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A WORLD HE NEVER MADE By
EDWIN BENSON

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Cover Artist for:

"A WORLD HE NEVER MADE"

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of incidentals and accidentals. I never painted a nude. I made the Britannica. I accidentally turned up in a volume on pen-and-ink experts—with a drawing which was the only one of its type I ever made.

(Continued on page 162)

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A WORLD HE NEVER MADE (Novel—28,000) by Edwin Benson 8

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Stuart Case, experimenting with radio frequencies, heard a weird sound that led him across limitless space to the aid of a beautiful girl and a dying planet...

YOU'VE GOT TO BELIEVE (Short—9,700) by Frank M. Robinson 56

Illustrated by Leo Ramon Summers

Bummy knew that "into each life some rain must fall." But not until he could take over the body of any man he envied did he get caught in a cloudburst!

THE GREEN BLOOD OF TREACHERY (Novelet—17,500) by Willard Hawkins 74

Illustrated by Virgil Finlay

It's tough to be in love with a girl who doesn't know you're alive. But when she puts on a green skin and sticks her neck into danger—brother, you're in trouble!

SOME WOLVES CAN'T KILL! (Novelet—14,000) by William P. McGivern 108

Illustrated by Lawrence

You couldn't meet a nicer young man than Percy Pettibone. At least, not until he accepted a drink from a chap who didn't exist—and started baying at the moon!

THE BETRAYERS (Short—5,400) by Gene Hunter 130

Illustrated by Frank Navarro

The Jovians listened to Marko's lies; then, as expected, they locked him up. Now he was a prisoner—so why pamper him by supplying a lovely woman to be his slave?

Front cover painting by Robert Gibson Jones, illustrating
a scene from "A World He Never Made"

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The

OBSERVATORY

by the Editor

AS FAR as we're concerned, June 12, 1951, was the day mankind turned the most important corner in recorded history—or unrecorded history, for that matter. For on that day a New York newspaper columnist gave the first inkling that recent tests at the atomic proving grounds in the South Pacific gave our government the proof it had been seeking: the H-bomb CAN be produced—and Uncle Sam's the boy who's going to produce it!

OUR FIRST reaction was pure horror and a longing look at the far horizon, followed by a kind of grim relief that, since so incredible a weapon was possible, ours was the team who would have it first. Think for a moment of the consternation among the world's free nations had they learned that a potential enemy held the secret of the Heli bomb! That the reverse is true means we have even more than a powerful weapon; we have a fresh supply of the most valuable commodity around these days: peace of mind!

HOWEVER, we doubt if there'll be any dancing in the streets over the news. Regardless of who first discovered the secret, the fact remains that what one set of scientists produces, another eventually can duplicate. Consequently, Team Number One must work overtime to discover an even more destructive weapon—only to learn later that Team Number Two has matched that one as well! And so it will go at an ever increasing pace until somebody ignores a "No Smoking" sign and ignites the powder keg.

THERE'S an alternative, of course. If there were not, the world's lower lip would be chewed to fragments. Before it's too late, before this planet is battered into a wasteland, before a tiny remnant of Earth's population is driven back to the caves, the other half of the world must rediscover the basic truth that freedom is mankind's natural state, and that no nation or coalition of nations can make it come out any different....

SOME of the details of those recent atomic tests at "Target" island in the Eniwetok area were enough to curdle the blood of a cikar-store Indian. The feature explosion was reported as being five times

more powerful than any previous A-bomb blast. This in the face of reports that an earlier explosion was many times more powerful than the ones that leveled Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Let's see now: five times "many" times equals...equals...the end!

THE GLARE of the principal explosion, it is said, briefly blinded observers nearly twenty miles distant, and those observers were wearing glasses so nearly opaque that through them the sun itself seemed no more than a weak pinpoint of light! Not only that but the heat of splitting atoms across those miles was almost unbearable! As an army officer present at the tests said, we're fooling around with something that belongs only to the Almighty!

OTHER facts that came out of this man-made sun: every animal on the island (put there for experimental purposes) completely disappeared, leaving not so much as a single red corpse to be put under a microscope. Even the steel tower, many stories in height, from which the bomb was exploded, had disappeared—utterly vaporized by a heat that passes man's understanding. Several radio-controlled planes, presumably flying miles above the explosion, were destroyed.

ONE ITEM of information to come out of the test verified a point we'd made in *The Observatory* a few months back. It seems the scientists were able to return to "Target" island in perfect safety less than three hours after the blast and, without danger, approach to within half a mile of the center of damage. This lays to rest, forever, the popular misconception of enduring radioactivity following a theoretical A-bomb attack....

AFTER you've read the foregoing, the following item becomes the month's prize anti-climax. In response to many requests, *Amazing Stories* will begin a column of book reviews with the October issue. Since reviews and/or criticisms of any subject should be done by an expert, we've gone to the top for the right man. He's Sam Merwin, former editor of *Thrilling Wonder* and *Startling*. Publishers of science-fiction books please note! —HB

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A WORLD HE NEVER MADE

By Edwin Benson

**When a weird machine caught a signal
that should never have sounded,
Earth faced annihilation!**



The Faceless One made a convulsive effort to avoid the ray, then burst into flames!



IT ALL began with the cross-eyed jaguar...

The Indians called him Pizarro because he liked to kill plump, good-natured Indians. He lived at the very

headwaters of the Apurimac. The Apurimac is the one of the beginnings of the Amazon, high in the Andes.

The Indian whom the cross-eyed jaguar chose for his meal that day was

called Arinche. This name Arinche did not like, but he could do nothing about it, as the tribal chief had given it to him with a great deal of ceremony. He did not like the name because it meant "first to return". Arinche did not like always to be reminded that his fears of the jungle invariably caused him to be the first one back in camp after every hunt.

Today Arinche noted the jaguar following him at some distance. He took to the waters of the Apurimac and waded upstream, hoping the animal would lose scent and sight of him.

The stream narrowed, the walls of the canyon closed in about him. Arinche prayed to *Pachacimac* to preserve him, and then furtively crossed himself and prayed a little prayer to St. Francis and to the God of the white men, just in case. For this was a region forbidden, a place where no man in his right mind would set foot, a place of the Other Gods who ruled before mankind existed.

Looking back, Arinche could see the jaguar mincing steadily along the banks just above the water—and when the rocks closed out the light overhead and the way became dim, he could see the dreadful silhouette of the great cat growing ever larger behind him. So he threw away all his fear of the unknown and the forbidden and rushed on headlong into the darkness of the cave from which the Apurimac was born.

Arinche fell over rough projections, banged his head against great white things pendant from the ceiling, and ran on, terror pressing him from all sides, but worst of all from behind where the steady *pad-pad* of cat feet sounded relentlessly in his ears.

Arinche knew that his end was near, and that he might as well die from the magic of the Ancients who reputedly lived forever in these deeps as from the claws of the no less destructive

jaguar.

The cavern was becoming less dark ahead, but the growing light was not sunlight. The rough stone walls were no longer rough, but smooth, gleaming like mirrors; and his reflection fled from him and ran at him in all directions along the mirroring walls. He came to a great bulk of metal, about which were a number of strange metal seats. Arinche rested there on one of them. He was exhausted and had no other choice; he could not take another step. His ears strained along his back track, hoping not to hear what he knew he would, the stealthy approach of the killer cat.

But there was no sign of the jaguar, and Arinche turned back to examine the strange metallic monstrosity upon which he rested. There were numerous knobs and projections, like wide keys set in a line. It was very like a weird musical instrument he had seen in a Christian church long before.

Not from curiosity, but from a petulant irritation with the mystery of his surroundings, Arinche tugged at these knobs, depressed several of the keys, turned a little wheel on one side.

The strange bulk began to throb inwardly, like a vast beast come suddenly to life. Then it spoke, in a voice of muted thunder. "*Woo-wohuh-woo!*" A shuddery vibration running out of it shook the frightened body of the Indian.

Here was a more terrible thing than any jaguar!

Arinche promptly leaped to his feet, a new fear driving his limbs to fresh running strength. He fled back along the way he had come in blind, unthinking panic. It was inevitable that Arinche, looking backward at the fearful mystery of the weird, throbbing monster, tumbled headlong over the startled, crouching jaguar. Pizarro, recovering his wits first, sprang upon Arinche and ate the larger part of him.

This time Arinche would not be the first to return . . .

* * *

FAR ABOVE Earth, out in the airless void, circled a gigantic flattened sphere of metal. From within the sphere, had there been anybody to hear, came a strange sound: *Woo-wohuh-woo!*

And, had there been observers inside the sphere, they would have seen the opening of certain relays within the mechanism which activated a gray mass that sat upon a lonely pedestal in an open space at the very center of the floating sphere of metal.

The gray mass began to ripple with excess electricity, and within the corrugations of it, strange reactions occurred. Thought began where had been no thought for so long. The great ship, for that was what it was, turned idly, and from it peered the long television beams of its search system as the wakened metal mind on the pedestal strove to learn what was the source of the abruptly generated signal: *woo-wohuh-woo!*

* * *

FAR OFF, in the world of skyscrapers and modern apartments that was New York City, in a certain cubicle within one of those apartment-house towers, sat a man-like form. Before him was a wall filled with the control panels of a dozen varied types of communicators, built by a dozen different civilizations. This equipment was capable of picking up and making audible any signal that could possibly ripple the ether; and the man-like creature was listening to the murmurs of code from several wide-flung transmitters.

Suddenly above the chattering mix-

ture of innocuous messages in code arose a powerful scream of sound: *woo-wohuh-woo!*

The queerly non-human man sprang to his feet both in fear of deafness from the volume and in surprise at the nature of the signal.

The sound went on and on, as if someone had set a signal-buoy in operation and gone off and left it. The man searched through a stack of singularly ancient books and selected one labeled "Mayacan-cabularie". Rapidly he searched through the strange metallic leaves of that book, and after a time he gave a great sigh of awe, a kind of gasp of incredulous unbelief.

"The Ancients awake!" he muttered.

The strange man made certain hurried preparations to seek the source of that amazing wave of power.

The most peculiar detail of that personage, who was not of Earth's race, was that he had no face such as men display in the world, but only an eyeless expanse of flesh, with holes for breathing, and a mouth which was not as other mouths, being smaller and yet more flexible of lip.

* * *

INCREDIBLY deep into Space, ultra-powerful etheric waves of the forgotten sound moved; a signal such as had not been heard in the vicinity of Earth for twelve thousand years. Outward and onward, the near-vacuum of Space its especial medium for propagation, went the weird signal, to impinge at last upon the detecting magnetic fields of a huge vessel of Space bearing on its prow a circle, which was the symbol for the known universe, and within the circle a flame, which was the symbol for the ruling race and of their dominance of all the universe.

The huge ship had a vast capacity for destruction. From every turret and swiveling blister and belly-port pro-

jected the ringed and pointed muzzles of weapons, and from the bowels of the space monster throbbed a mighty pulse of perpetual motion as the generators piled up an accumulation of the infinite power that had crushed all resistance to their supremacy. From the drive points a mighty sheet of flame fled rearward. This ship surged through Space because a new campaign of conquest was underway. So the Lords of the Flame had decreed!

The people in this ship were of a dark red-hued complexion, and upon each breast the symbol of the flame burned to mark their allegiance. Upon their garments little flames were decoratively embroidered in various ways, each variation marking the station and authority of the individual. The flame was the sign and symbol of their whole purpose—the spreading of the flames that marked the dominions of the Lords of the Flame to yet new worlds.

Into this ship of conquest swept the weird and powerful *woo-wohuh-woo*, deafening their sensitive, long-listening ears; and consternation crossed the square, red-skinned faces—consternation, terror and abject awe.

"The signal of the Thians! The sound of death of the far past! How can this be? It is not possible! The Thians are dead!"

Shortly after, from the vast belly of the warship a small craft dropped, shot off at a tangent to their course upon a direct bearing taken on the source of the strange and terrifying signal. Far ahead of it, Earth and her peoples spun sleepily on their way, unknowing of the many chains of circumstance that the Indian, Arinche, had knit together out of chance.

The people of the Flame would have passed Earth unheeding had not a signal unheard by their detectors in many long lifetimes been heard. *Woo-wohuh-woo!*

To the Flame People that sound

meant war, meant the fight against an ancient, long-prophesied vengeance that was to descend upon them from the powerful hand of an ancient and formidable enemy.

* * *

THERE WERE yet two other creatures whose lives were completely changed by hearing that strange signal from an instrument unused for twelve thousand Earth years....

On a planet on the very rim of Earth's Solar System, within a great stone ruin, incredibly massive, in a once mighty city, a woman sat at the eyepiece of an ancient cylinder of gleaming black metal mounted on immense gymbals. It was a telescope with a synthetic diamond lens of great size, a famous piece of work by a long dead master astronomer, and she had journeyed to that desolate spot to make use of the famous instrument that yet stood uncorrupted among the ruins of a long dead city.

The name of the dead world was Gard-A, and the name of the woman at the telescope was Ra-Lakme of Narn. She was a student of astronomy and certain related sciences, called in her tongue, *Alsunic*. This was her *wanderyar*, a period of travel necessary to all who would receive a title of honor from the great universities of her world. She was at work upon her graduate thesis.

Since her work included the taking of the vibratory energy-patterns of the star-bodies which she studied, she was equipped with very sensitive receiving devices of an electronic nature which could pick up all manner of vibrations that come through the ether. Thus it was inevitable that the strong signal from the ancient mechanism in the cavern in the Andes should nearly shat-

ter her best *capulis*. *Woo-wohuh-woo!*

She went instantly to work to replace the damaged crystal and fused wires, and to trace down the source of the weird sound.

Ra-Lakme knew a great deal about a startling number of things not known even to her advanced race. But this signal was very puzzling, as its like, to her certain knowledge, had not been in existence for too many years to think about accurately. Its presence betokened events and activities of an importance far beyond her powers to understand. She made an official report, dispatched it to her father, the astronomer-in-charge upon far-off Narn.

Ra-Lakme did know, however, that this was a signal of distress, given off by but one kind of apparatus—the type keyed to a ship in captive orbit about every wilderness planet. Long ago, when this titanic ruin of a city on Gard-A had been a flourishing metropolis, these rescue ships had been set at each of certain wilderness planets during a time when a great many ships were being lost in space. The system had not been in use for so long that it was nearly impossible for this signal to be from that source, today. There were not a dozen other students of antiquity like herself who could even know of the existence of the signal device and the robot ship keyed to its call, for there were so few able to read the stored records of that time, and of those few hardly a one but herself who had made a particular study of the superfluous part of inconsequential books such as the *Rotic Manual's* Appendices. Ra-Lakme thrilled to think that of all the many minds of eminence among her numerous people perhaps hers alone contained that particular bit of forgotten knowledge.

Ra-Lakme's maiden heart thrilled still further to the core at the expectancy, the suspense of her waiting

here! For if her recollections were not at fault, that robot-driven rescue ship set out by those long-vanished ancestors of hers would bring the person or persons who had activated the signal device here, to long-dead Gard-A!

This desert planet had once been the heart and hub and center of the vast space-empire of the Thians. That robot rescue ship should alight very near this very observatory, once the focal point of the many space-lanes linking all the titanic empire of the Thians. But why should anyone who *knew* this city had been empty and in ruins for ten thousand years use that signal or that ship—to come here? It would only be so if they *did not know*. And if that were the case...

* * *

THE OTHER living person who noticed the sudden advent of the new force into the myriad interwoven waves of the crowded ether, who heard that strange and unearthly *woo-wohuh-woo*, was young Stuart Case, would-be radio technician. Stuart was a stocky broad-shouldered red-head who possessed a stubbornness and a curiosity beyond the normal. His keen blue eyes and square capable hands obedient to that curious and stubborn mind were not able to lay aside the mystery inherent in the weird *woo-wohuh-woo*. To him it was *not* a meaningless intrusion upon the interwoven magnetic fields of the stratosphere (as the so-called experts explained via radio and newspaper to their own satisfaction). He accepted the obviously designed and purposeful wave as some powerful illegal transmitter disregarding all attempt at secrecy.

Stuart Case quickly attached a directional device to his own powerful detector apparatus and listened. He

worked and pondered as he listened to the repeated etheric scream, waiting for the signal to alter into some recognizable pattern of code or the scrambled product upon which he could work with his own not inconsiderable ability for deciphering the supposedly undecipherable communications so frequently sent through the ether.

Since the signal only went on weirdly wailing at intervals of regularity, he spent some time checking his directional device with still more sensitive devices.

After some days of such activity, Stuart recognized he had run upon something very unusual and completely mystifying. He decided not to rest until he had traced that call to its origin.

Since he at first had no intention of leaving his home and his work, he set out to build a transmitter of that particular wavelength, and in two short weeks he (not without trepidation at so flouting the authority of the FCC, which had declared transmission on that band forbidden to all but governmental employees) began to attempt an answer in kind to the source of the strange signal.

Thus, of all the civilized and cultured peoples of the broad Earth, there were but two who heard that signal and acted: Stuart Case, a young man of large talent and little resource other than his own ingenious mind and capable hands; and the faceless man, a citizen of no nation on Earth, employed by an organization whose roots were in deep Space.

The faceless man, at first startled out of his ordinary routine of casual observation of the Earth people's communication through the ether, arrived at his own correct solution of the enigma after some study and listening to the signal. He deduced that some ancient mechanism of the former

great race of the far past had been set into accidental and meaningless activity by an ignorant hand. As the signal went on and on, he dismissed it from attention—until Stuart went into action with his own transmitter in the same attunement with his own peculiar ideas of what kind of modulation would best elicit some answer from the source of the repetitive wave.

Stuart's completely incomprehensible signals were heard instantly in the apartment-house listening post of the faceless man.

* * *

ONE DAY after Stuart Case sent out his first questing signal to the mysterious broadcasting source, the man-without-a-face picked up a little box and left his hidden installation. Passing through the great apartment house, he put on a rubber mask giving him a superficially normal appearance. To a close observer, however, his broad back and flexible knees would have betrayed that his skeletal structure was far from that of the normal Earth-human.

Watching the needle on his little black box, the strange watcher-of-men drove hundreds of miles, to pull up at last outside Stuart Case's door. He got out, locked the car, stood in the rain for long minutes.

Hearing a crackle in the air overhead that Earth ears could not have heard, the man in the rain pushed back his hat and peered upward. Since he was alone in the car, he had removed the rather stifling mask, and the light for an instant shone smoothly over the surface of what should have been a face. In that light his head resembled nothing so much as a Brancusi sculpture; for there were no eyes, no mouth, and but two almost imperceptible openings where the nose should have been. The place where the mouth

would be, opened. A slit appeared like a knife gash across the pallid smoothness. Then the hat came back down, and the face that was no face was hidden in shadow.

If Stuart could have seen his own five-wire aerial just then, he would have understood the man's interest if not his presence. For a vivid blue flame came and went, pulsed and vanished, each time the weird *woo-woh-woo* came howling along the wires.

The watcher seemed to count the pulsations and a strange excitement tensed his frame as Stuart's answer pulsed out and the blue died away. Stuart's signals, designed purposely to confuse, and so cause some questioning answer, had served his purpose, but not as he had intended. If he had known the inhuman thought within that faceless head, he would have felt the cold of infinite Space along his spine.

Before the watcher from another world could make a further move from where he stood, another car drew up behind his own and two men got out and went up to Stuart's door.

The man in the rain became almost excited as Stuart's shadow could be seen answering the door. He leaned forward, moved several gliding, skipping steps closer, soundless as a dream. But as Case's ruddy bright Earth face and tousled orange hair came into view, the man in the rain relaxed, rather wearily, and watched the rest of the interview with an attitude expressing amused boredom.

"We have traced the output of an illegal transmitter to this location. Do you deny the existence of this transmitter on your premises?" asked the man in the blue pinstripe suit.

Stuart rubbed his head sleepily. "I don't deny a thing, gentlemen. My brother fell downstairs unexpectedly yesterday, and left the power on some

experimental apparatus. I only just found it. I am sorry that I was inadvertently cluttering up your ether with illegal waves, but it was strictly an accident."

The two gentlemen relaxed visibly. "We will have to inspect your equipment, and fill out certain routine forms, you understand. However, if there is no recurrence, we will take no official action at this time. But just as a friendly personal warning..." The pinstripe suited man let an audible edge creep into his suave voice. "If it happens any more they are going to throw the book at you."

Stuart Case was a young man with rather definite ideas about freedom and sanctity of the home—besides he felt that the restrictions upon all amateurs were unnecessarily severe. He shook his orange mop of hair at the two officious gentlemen, not smiling and not bothering to look apologetic.

"If you have a warrant all regular and shipshape, and if you are duly constituted guardians of the law, you can come in. Otherwise no! Since I know you won't go that far this time, goodnight, gentlemen. I wish never to meet you again."

Stuart closed the door with a firm bang, and retraced his steps to his littered workshop. There he listened to the intrusive pair's departure, then smacked a fist into a palm and galvanized into sudden activity, tossing clothes into suitcases and apparatus into wooden boxes. Moving was a chore he had indulged in frequently for various reasons. He wanted to move again—and he knew the direction.

Outside in the rain, the faceless man returned quietly to his parked car and sat there, silent and waiting. One glance at the young man with the red hair, and his quick faculties had put together the situation and the man—and he *knew* what the man was going

to do next.

The operation of packing consumed several hours. When he ran out of boxes, Stuart threw things into bed-sheets and tied the corners. Before morning he had stowed everything aboard his antiquated Packard.

As the sun shoved a fevered face above the far horizon, the Packard was rolling along a highway to the south. Stuart had decided upon St. Louis as his destination because it lay exactly upon the line he had drawn upon his map. That line was derived from his directional antenna.

He meant to follow that line until he knew what the strange signal meant if Hell itself got in the way.

Stuart had not the slightest idea of *what* he was tracing down.

He nearly fell asleep driving his old Packard, and parked along the road to catch up with neglected Morpheus. In his dreams the weird *woo-wohuh-woo* went on and on, sounding like the sobbing of some giantess in distress, deep in the earth....

* * *

NOT LONG after Stuart had left his home for the first hop southward, a car stopped some distance from the house he had vacated. Out of it got a strongly-built squat figure with a flame-red face, clad in ill-fitting clothes newly procured. He mounted along the kitchen roof monkey-wise, and let himself into Stuart's upstairs window. He was there but a few minutes, and left the same way.

As he got into the car again, he glanced up, and the street lamp lit up weirdly for an instant that face of dull red flesh, devoid of humor—the face of a brutal warrior of no race of Earth. He got into the car and drove off southward, as if he knew the exact route and direction of Stuart's pursuit of the strange signal. And in fact

he did, for he had just come from there.

* * *

STUART CASE was of that material of which heroes and inventors are made, but he did not look upon himself as unusual. He saw himself only as a stubborn young man greatly irritated by being told not to look into such things as the weird signal from the unknown by such blind officials as the gentlemen from the FCC. The bands of vibration of the electro-magnetic spectrum were far more fascinating to him than the color spectrum to an artist.

He tried to imagine an artist told he must never look at any pigment containing the hue of red because it was officially pre-empted to the use of authority and authority's employees and favorites, that to paint a picture containing red was illegal! He tried to imagine that artist never secretly trying to do a painting with all the forbidden hues from the forbidden band of color carefully incorporated. For instance, a painting of a nude with none of the red hues of life in the flesh, none of the blood in the painted body, none of the roses in the cheeks! An artist *will* use his full spectrum, and such men as Stuart Case felt himself to be would also never refrain from plumbing the reaches of vibratory energy until they know precisely all that they can learn about them.

Stuart had been furious that the strange signal had not received official notice and investigation; and he was completely burned up when his own efforts had brought censure to him, even though he had known his act was certain to do so.

In New Orleans the trail of the strange signal still pointed southward, and Stuart took a plane to Peru, thinking to fly beyond its source and thus at least localize it in some part of

the world.

In Cuzco his bearing pointed still southward, over the wildest and most inaccessible regions of the Andes. Stuart was almost daunted by the impossibility of his quest with his limited resources. But that stubborn will to learn drove him on....

He screwed up his courage, spent his last pitiful funds outfitting himself with pack mules and purchasing a good rifle. Then he plunged into the unknown, with somewhat the feeling of an ant plunging off the edge of the sink.

* * *

NOT LONG after Stuart bought the mules, another stranger arrived in the tiny South American village. He was a man who kept his coat on even in the terrific heat, who drove his own car into the town and rented space in the one small garage. He unloaded several bundles, his face expressionless and his movements vaguely confusing, his legs at times bending into impossible angles. He did not speak, but made his way with gestures. He also bought pack animals, loaded them with apparent skill, and started off southward. He was two hours behind Stuart.

Not long after the flexible-legged man with the inflexible face had vanished into the wilderness after his quarry, there came two others, also strangers. They were very squat, very red of skin, yet they looked like no Indians known to the people of that area. They also spoke with gestures; they also loaded provisions upon mules; they also took the same trail southward into the increasing height of the terrifying Andes. But they carried weapons no man of the mountain village had ever before seen—two heavy black tubes across their backs, not rifles nor machine guns, but some-

thing which looked even more deadly, as if they had been seared and tempered in the flames of Hell itself.

Stuart headed southward with three strangers upon his trail, not knowing he was not alone in his quest.

The faceless man, discarding his rubber mask in the heat and the loneliness of the wilderness, saw the dust on the trail behind him and wondered idly, but did not suspect the death upon his trail.

* * *

STUART CASE found, after proceeding on foot for some days, that his apparatus would now detect even slight variations in his course, so that a hundred feet to the right or to the left was detectable, not in the volume, but in the sound of the note given off by the diaphragms. Although he had muffled them and cut his power to near nothing, the signal was deafening. These facts gave him increased confidence that he was nearing his goal, that he could not help but locate the source if he kept to the narrow lane of its central signal tone.

But the impassable abysses of the Andes lay before him. Chasms opened, taking days to circle. These were the days in which he spent much thought debating the wisdom of his search.

At last the signal began to increase, became again deafening even in his doubly-muffled phones. He was certain that he was very near the source. This place was the bottom of one of the great cliff-lined valleys which let their rivers eastward to begin the mighty Amazon. Up this tiny stream he struggled, the lush verdure giving way to the dwarfed trees of the heights.

The stream, which itself followed closely the center of his signal path, passed into a rocky opening in the canyon wall. He followed, and the

rocks which at first gave a view of a narrow strip of sky overhead, drew together and became a cavern roof. Stuart lit his lantern and went on, along the cavern watercourse. The stream led to its birth in a round, quiet pool where a spring bubbled forever out of the rocks beneath. The gnawed bones of Arinche lay like a portent there beside the quiet pool, white and broken, the eyeless skull staring up at him with mute warning.

The way led inward into a wilder tangle of stalagmitic growths, too difficult for even his two mules to negotiate but in him now was a fever of imminent discovery. He tied his mounts, left the baggage piled, pressed on with only his lantern, a package of food and a canteen of water.

Knowing that the choice might be direct suicide, he yet reassured himself that his direction was accurate as any string from the signals in his battery set. He prayed only that his well-used batteries would not decide to become exhausted. He would be lost forever in this darkness without that signal to guide him on his return.

Onward, the way was still open before him, the signal leading on and on. "*Woo-wohuk-woo!*" Weird, endless sound of distressful meaning... Stuart wondered why the mournful sound of it was so suggestive of disaster.

He came at last to a hall of hewn rocks, the work of inhumanly able hands. Further on began walls of polished smoothness, which reflected every movement over and over and on and on in all directions. Seamless, titanic, seemingly cut thus and polished so perfectly by some magical means that there was no mark of tool or seam of joining.

In that wall was a round opening, through which he passed over a mass of rubble, and so through a series of similar openings into still other mirror-bright and smooth-walled chambers.

AT LAST he came into the very center of a great crypt. There burned a flickering orange light with no flame, a round rod of shining metal giving off the light. Beneath the orange glow of light was a series of keyboards where it seemed many men might have sat to play simultaneously as if it were a multiple-piped organ.

Stuart Case sat wonderingly in one of the metal seats, now in a daze of weariness but yet borne up by the fever of search rewarded, by the ecstasy of reaching the goal he had spent so much effort upon. He fingered the keys, and nearly fell with surprise as the note he had listened to so long changed in his phones, changed exactly in proportion as he depressed the keys.

Case had to do many hours of thinking, revising his ideas of the whys and wherefores of the world as he knew it. He reasoned that this thing, obviously of great antiquity, had been capable of sending out this signal for unknown centuries—but some *living* hand must recently have set it in operation. He reasoned that the creators had built it for some purpose—which purpose was not in any way obvious to him or to any man of modern times. Or was it forgotten and unknown? Was there lurking here some creature who understood and used this machine, waiting to learn his helplessness before attacking? Stuart fingered his rifle nervously, wondering if he was skillful enough to use it effectively in a genuine battle.

To whom was the signal directed? Centuries ago, thousands of years ago—it must have been created before written history, before the time of the earliest known records of antiquity. What could have been its purpose?

Was not his own mechanical age the *only* mechanical age? Did then the words *Venus Mechanitis* mean more than the idle Greek phrase of

praise to the Goddess? Did this thing before him not prove there had been a former age of iron and steel and an even more advanced age of incorruptible metal alloys—long before modern man began his long climb from ignorance? Was the age of gasoline, after all, not the peak and summit of all Nature's effort to produce intelligence?

Sitting thus, thinking, fiddling with the keys, he began to play a little tune: *Yankee Doodle*, absently fingering the keys, listening to the vast drone of the notes without the need for phones as it responded to his fingers. Then he began to do the multiplication tables. Two notes, two notes, and then four. Three notes, three notes, and then nine. He kept this up for hours, then ate, drank his water, and slept.

When he awoke, he repeated the performance all over again. He was hoping that, if by some chance the target of this weird signal beam was a conscious, thinking, living being, or beings, they would note the signal tampering and make some reply.

At last, worn out, his water canteen nearly empty, he gave up the impossible idea that this obviously very ancient mechanism had any purpose in today's world. He gave it up as beyond solution, for he knew no science of today that could explain a power source and a radio signaling device which would go on for the centuries this thing had evidently survived.

He made his way slowly back to the surface and to his mules and the spring at the head of the stream.

Stuart Case camped there, where the stream came out of the canyon wall, pondering on the weird signal device in the cavern. He still vaguely expected some reply, but logic told him that was pure nonsense! Whatever the thing was, it was not being listened to by anything alive today who knew its significance. Again he

slept.

In the cold light of the following dawn a stranger came up to his camp's sleeping quiet. Stuart, still dazed with sleep, peered up at him out of his sleeping bag—and shuddered and nearly screamed out in horror at his face that was not a face, but only a smooth expanse of skin.

THE MAN did not speak, but only stood and waited idly. Stuart, too startled and horrified to speak, at last scrambled out of his sleeping bag to get a good look at this monstrous creature—and to get his hands on a weapon. Then he stood, waiting too, and examining the stranger with complete attention.

His arms were too long, his legs too flexible and his back too broad and strong. He was *not* a man for all his appearance of mankind. His clothing could not hide his alien shape. Stuart at last went closer to the man in complete bewilderment.

"What are you? Without a face; not even shaped like a man. What are you, stranger? And what do you want?"

The face opened queerly and words came out. Or did they? Did he only hear them in his mind?

"I am one who guards you from a danger which strikes at all who learn that such things as these exist. Was there any answer to your attempt to use the signal generators?"

"No answer," Stuart replied dazedly, struggling to keep his composure, to understand and to accept the queer reality facing him. "I gave up, thinking my whole trip a futile one."

"Do not give up! Much can come of this for you and yours. We will wait. . ."

"For what?"

"Once there was a ship set to answer that signal. I wonder who could have started it up again? And fled when they found there was still energy

leashed within the ancient thing. That is a puzzle to me too."

The man-without-a-face then walked away, making camp at some distance beyond and above Stuart so that he looked out over a long stretch of the trail up which they had both ascended to the stream.

* * *

OUT IN Space, the endless circling of the ancient satellite (that flattened sphere of metal containing unknown mechanisms) changed. Engines started up at the decided command of the gray mass upon the lonely pedestal within the central chamber. The strange shape left its ancient orbit and descended toward the Earth with a long, flashing trail of light, like a meteor captured out of the upper air.

Why the ship had delayed response to the signal until now was explainable by the fact that it was of incredible age. The robot had given the electrical impulse of command to the drive mechanisms, but a relay had been stiffened by time. The robot had pondered long over the difficulty, then used an adjacent set of controls to attain the same result.

The goal of its swift descent was a point in the Andes, where it settled gently to the ground between Stuart Case and his faceless guardian.

* * *

AS CASE stood up to go to the strange sphere of metal, his mind a whirl of awe and unbelief and unwilling acceptance of his eyes' evidence—as his heart leaped to see the tangible response to his search—a thunderclap rang out from the high cliffside above and behind him. A little smoking crater of fused sand formed at his feet.

Not recognizing attack, Stuart stood there in the open, peering about and trying to understand what had struck at him—actually he thought a small meteorite had fallen and barely missed him.

The man-without-a-face flung himself down behind an immense boulder and began to fire his own long-barreled weapon. Stuart looked at this action with complete confusion, for it was not a rifle, but weapon that lashed and hissed at the cliff above with a narrow flame of energy that caused a small cascade of pebbles and smoking sand to fly out from the target.

As he stood there in complete confusion and panic, a circular door swung quietly open in the under half of the flattened sphere. It was an opening which to Stuart's startled nerves appeared as a haven from the incomprehensible barrage from above. Even as the thunderclap came again, and the sands smoked furiously about his feet, he darted to the doorway and fell inside the ship.

Behind him the firing went on. In a second he had pulled himself together, knelt and sighted his own rifle out at the cliffside. Seeing faint movement on a ledge, he fired, again and again. The recurrent thunderclap of the unknown weapon ceased. Belatedly, into the sudden silence, a body tumbled down, end over end, bringing with it an increasing mass of stones and rubble and dust. It came to rest a scant ten feet away at the edge of the tiny stream.

The faceless man left his covering boulder, moved into the open to search the fallen body. Another clap of terrible sound from above, and Stuart flinched to see the faceless man stagger and fall, his left arm and shoulder a smoking mass of burnt flesh. But as Stuart moved to go to the fallen stran-

ger, the injured man pushed himself erect, tottered back toward Stuart.

He fell again, just outside the doorway, and Case leaped out and dragged him into shelter.

"Are you badly hurt?" asked Stuart, foolishly, for no living thing could survive a blow like that.

"I am dying, little man of Earth. But that is not too important. *You* are important now, and *you* must carry a message for me!"

Stuart watched the featureless expanse of skin that should have been a face flinch at the pain of drawn breath, then struggle back to conscious speech again.

"The man you shot—his red face and his flame-symbol on his tunic—that is your message! This robot ship which came to you will bear you where that message will be understood. Take with you this wallet and my ring. *They* will know!"

Stuart crouched above the dying man, all the unearthly background of the creature evident, plain before his sharpened perceptions. The irrelation, the outlandish impossibility of the week's events culminated in this murder of a man who had died apparently defending Stuart from attack, was incomprehensible. All he could say was: "I do not understand."

The dying creature of another world gasped in exasperation, swore in some alien tongue, then said: "Man, can you not see that I am not as other men? I am an agent of an organization vast beyond your knowledge of size. We watch here on Earth always for the eventual approach of certain enemies. Our expected enemies are called the People of the Flame. The red-faced murderer is the first trace I have found of their presence. He bears their insignia and he is their color. That they plan new aggressions is evident. I have no strength to ex-

plain more.

"Stay with this ship. It will bear you to where this fact *must* be known. Earth is doomed unless you bring her help, the help I would have brought had I lived. Push my body out the door and let the ship take off. It awaits only the closing of the air-lock."

Stuart gently did as he was told, and as the man's body lay outside, he realized he should have kept him, for he was not yet dead—and might recover. But Stuart closed the door of the craft even as another blast of sound came from above, and a sparkling spray of smoking sand struck about the closing disk of the door. As the door clicked shut, the floor beneath him moved, tilted, began to rise with increasing pressure against his feet.

GLANCING about him, Stuart saw another door, which opened of itself. Within he saw a larger chamber, starkly bare, triangular. Two walls were planed and one a curved surface. At the center of the triangular space was a glistening mass, resting upon a low pedestal. The mass gave off a rosy glow of light. It was about the size of a basketball, and seemed to have startling effects on him. It must contain some nerve-awakening vibration which struck his flesh with the sensations of sprays of fluid from the Fountain of Youth. The effect was to give him instantaneous and almost embarrassing awareness of his own body, waking his entire range of perceptions far beyond normal activity. Stuart did not know it, but the healing light was controlled by the robot brain, and its use was standard procedure for the revival of exhausted castaways.

The lock door closed silently behind him, the floor tilted more steeply, the

rapid ascent became bewilderingly swift, and Stuart nearly fell as acceleration took hold with rude hands. After a moment he adjusted, looked about.

There was no machinery visible in the room other than the rosily glowing mass on the pedestal. There was a large curved chair, seemingly built for a creature larger than a man. Wide straps of gleaming plastic-like material swung idly from the chair arms, and after a trial, Stuart decided that the chair was just too big for him.

There was also a kind of hammock, of pneumatic construction, puffed out to a thickness of a foot or more with air and gas under pressure. He started as a voice seemed to come from the glowing mass.

The voice was soundless, and compellingly distinct in his mind. "Yours is the only life aboard. This is a *robotlit*, and I am the pilot robot. Make yourself comfortable in the acceleration swing and I can begin our journey."

Stuart overcame his wonder at the mass and its soundless voice and stretched out in the peculiar hammock. A spring clip series along the sides was released by his weight, folding the whole thing about him with startlingly complete imprisonment in its puffy folds. Almost immediately the acceleration became an increasingly uncomfortable force, mounting rapidly until he felt the grasp of many gravities, painfully crushing him into the soft suspension material.

The acceleration held there, hour after hour, then gradually began to decrease. As the force lessened and the hammock no longer sagged downward beneath his weight, Stuart turned his attention to the rather frighteningly silent thing, aloof on its pedestal.

He asked: "If you are a thinking

creation, will you try to give me some idea of the purpose of this trip? Who are your masters? Why do they want me to visit them? What are they—humans like myself?"

From the glowing mass came a series of inexplicable clicks. Then his answer flowed out, soundlessly, yet so intense as to be deafening within his mind.

"There is no purpose to this trip! Your presence is accidental. I cannot help it, but I am a robot who must obey the pre-arranged orders built into my mechanism. This ship is a rescue ship, set above certain planets long ago abandoned by the *builders*—as your own race sets lightships and other safety devices upon the rocks of your oceans. I was put into this ship, the ship was set about the planet in an orbit. The original purpose was to make sure of the rescue of anyone accidentally marooned on your wild planet against his will. Every wilderness planet is so protected, as our race is one that looks out for its own. But now they have passed on and are forgotten!"

STUART WAS badly shaken. "There is no purpose to this trip..." he repeated dazedly. "Then I am captive of a robot set to perform a function that no longer exists!"

The voice went on, ignoring his words. "My masters were a people who once lived near your sorry world. At that time they built and placed the signal device you found, whose signal drew you to investigate it. It is of no more importance to them than is a lighthouse to you—a kind of standard safety device once installed by them wherever needful. But that was a long time ago—how long by your time measurement I have no way of knowing. I have only responded because I am constructed to obey. I am, how-

ever, also a conscious, thinking entity, due to a special area in my metal brain which tells me that my response is but a useless bit of involuntary servitude to chance."

"But the faceless man told me that where you would take me there would be someone to meet me—and he gave me a message for them!"

The robot clicked thoughtfully for a time, making no comment, then at last the voice came again: "I have sought through my memory for the identification of this faceless one you mention. There is no identification. It may be that some living beings still know what I am and where my pre-calculated flight will take us. I myself do not know, and I suspect that when we arrive there will be but ruin and desolation and no intelligent life of any kind."

Stuart gave a slight cry of exasperation. He had felt that he was embarking on a voyage to which he had been invited by superior beings—and he did not want to accept the robot's intimation that he was but an accident, a mere misdirection of circumstance!

"Tell me about yourself!" Stuart cried out, trying to learn surely just what he was getting into. "I must know all I can learn about you and this ship and such things as the red-faced men who killed the man-without-a-face—and why I am given a message to deliver to a place where no life will exist when I arrive!"

The robot began to speak at length, seeming to enjoy activity after so long a silence. "The mirrors of my mind reflect many things. I am an immortal in comparison to you, and could teach you a great deal. To me this is novel, a new experience, for in the far past I was but a lowly machine, a servant of beings with minds beyond my limited mechanical capability for comprehension; but you are as a little child to me! Even so, I must do as you

direct, for so I am constructed."

"If I knew what to direct!" growled Stuart.

The robot ignored him. "Some of the things that pass across the mirrors of my mind were not meant to be reflected within any mind. They are photo-sensitive surfaces, delicate, fragile, wonderful in intricacy, but easily damaged. Normal impulses affecting the photo-electric surfaces come out as rage, anger, irritation—and leave me a very bewildered robot at times. I suspect that I am a faulty robot, Stuart Case, even slightly mad . . ."

"Oh no!" Stuart groaned.

"There is no need to fear me," the robot hastened to assure him. "The functional relays of my mechanism are protected by an insulation which cancels out all but planned reactions."

"I am thankful to hear that," muttered Stuart, knowing now that the metal creature would hear him even if he did not speak.

The robot went on in a kind of soliloquy, and Stuart felt the creature was glad of an audience before which to display his mental abilities, the fruits of an age of silent meditation as he whirled forever about the Earth in his fixed and waiting orbit. "It is my opinion that the wars I have sensed going on about me, on your Earth and out in space too, leave broken lives by the millions. I think that your muddle-headed conquerors are obeying impulses from damaged areas of their brain, and are too ignorant to know the difference.

"History records the zig-zags of a see-sawing conflict long before my creation, and I see no reason to think that Nature has changed so much as to cease having wars between its creatures. Our ancient sciences have properly explained the mental aberrations of the humans who plunge us into the whirlpool of mass destruction. They are tiny vortices of force which spin

outward from diseased tissue, a tiny, unseen atomic fissioning which creates a similitude of thought. It is a thinking toward suicide! The sad part has always been that the base of such struggles is the idealism, the natural intention to herd others into a better path—and the mental breakdown that perverts that idealism is a sad thing.”

THE METAL robot emanated an almost physical pain of sorrow that Stuart could feel in his own mind.

“You see, mortal, your world is really a shattered world, a remnant of a once mighty civilization. The *Nature* which you believe has an inherent order is always, on all planets, but a mad and chaotic growth, a pell-mell warring of species with species and kind against kind, so that continuance of life means only a kind of sum of the murders of others. Wild life, natural life, has no order. But some species manage to bring about their own order and create about them conditions of life designed to give them a satisfactory medium of propagation and growth. You Earth humans are the remnant of such an order, as I also am. But it was shattered by a cataclysm long ago, from which only a pitiful few survived to perpetuate their kind, but not their mind and order.

“The species went on, shorn of all its knowledge, shorn forever of its inheritance by the destructive radiations which accompanied the sun-spot which caused their downfall.

“Your species is trying to bring about a new order, but they fail principally because they have no knowledge of the nature of the previous organization of life which gave them its inherited character, their best instincts. There are those still extant, I believe, out in the area of space toward which we are now traveling, who would help

you to bring about this better condition. They would do so to protect themselves from the possibility of a great and malevolent hive of degenerate-natured humans coming into existence on this planet. It would be a menace they would otherwise have to extend themselves to crush later on. I could help them, if they would but command me. I cannot act without command and understanding.”

“I begin to get a glimmer of what you are trying to tell me,” said Stuart, “but why do you, a robot, have any impulse to tell me such things?”

“I have two minds, one my own property, but it has no ability to affect the mechanical functions for which my other mind was built. My secondary mind is as much an emotional entity as you are.

“The ancient world of which I was a unit was built according to an already very ancient and time-tested master-pattern. Your inherited character, your best instincts, are things brought into being in creatures fitted for that perfect and beautifully systematic world of human beings—and it was all shattered and broken and lost in a chaos of darkness. For an age humans have grown up in the jungles and deserts of your broken world, and finally the modern age has come. Your discontents and unhappiness and frequent maladjustments are results of the conflict between what your inherited mind and character tells you should be the way of life, and the way your life really is: a rather insane and chaotic frictional mass of over-spawning animals who are unable and unwilling to bring about a more workable order of things.

“You labor under the misapprehension that there is a natural order in life, in Nature; a kind of thing you call Godhead working invisibly to bring order about. You have been

taught that, but the fact of the matter, on your planet, is the reverse. Once that belief would have been true, but that is the reason it still exists to mislead you. Once the world *had* mighty beings who worked to keep order and sanity.

"But for man of today, it were better to know that order and beauty and a sufficiently-planned life come only as a final development of a long path upward, or as a result of special conditions of life brought about by accident in some part of Space. For your people, it will come as no gift of an invisible being, but by your own mutual efforts only...."

The weird and ancient vessel hurtled on across the emptiness of Space, and the admittedly mad robot discoursed at length, and Stuart Case fell sound asleep listening.

* * *

FAR BACK along the ionic trail left by the drive force, a smaller vessel also hurtled, following that trail across the emptiness. Within the ship sat a squat, broad animal, not human in shape except superficially. His face was red as flame above the plain, harsh uniform, and on his breast the symbol of the flame burned vengefully. His arm was encased in a sling of bandages, and across his forehead the mark of a bullet had left a dark crease of dried blood. He had in his hands a little card; on the card were some strange words and a picture of a man without a face.

* * *

WHEN STUART awoke, the ship had landed. The door hung open. The robot on his pedestal was silent.

Case stepped out—and the awful age of his surroundings struck at him

with an infinitely alien remoteness, a shock of complete unexpectedness. Was this, then, all that was left of the Kingdom of the Ancient Civilization?

Like the forgotten communication device which had summoned the robot ship, this place was but an emptiness, an immensity of forgotten labors of Supermen, fallen into incredible desolation. On every hand the winds of time had scraped and rubbed away the beauty, leaving sand and worn stones and the empty, burning sunlight.

This desert, his destination? Impossible!

A sudden cry from behind him, out of the quiet, startled him. He whirled, ready to spring back into the waiting ship from he knew not what.

But toward him over the brilliant sand raced a female of almost human aspect, yet so alien to his concept of womanhood as to cause fear in his straining mind. Seeing the fear upon his flushed face, she stopped, her hands extended palms upward, her expression one of pleasure and peaceful intentions—and something else, like, "Welcome home, you are expected!"

She was of no determinable age, and taller than he by a head and a half, smooth of skin and not unhandsome. The differences, however, between her and any human of Stuart's experience, were far greater than he had felt in contact with the faceless man.

Her hands were all out of proportion! Fingers like tapered, jointed sticks, they were the most inhumanly perfect tools Stuart had ever seen; yet they were beautiful.

Her mouth was far too large for Stuart's notions of perfect symmetry, and her teeth were quite small and so regular and perfect of shape as to seem set like pearls in coral.

The wide-set dark eyes, glowing with an intensity, an inhuman pene-

tration, and aliveness so disconcerting as to be beyond Stuart's acceptance, just could not exist in a human face—they knew too much!

Her arms and shoulders rippled with smooth strength. Her legs and thighs were not completely visible beneath her abbreviated kilt, but Stuart found himself wishing that they were; this woman was endowed by nature beyond the comparatively puny women of his past, on Earth. Her breasts were quite frankly bare and very lovely. Her skin was tanned by the strange orange sun to a kind of deep Javanese complexion, like coffee with cream.

"Hello..." said Stuart weakly, and extended a limp hand, which he drew back at once as his own comparatively puny and obviously clumsy paw drew his eyes from her face to her hands.

"Vaga cum oo ic?" she asked, in the same excited anticipatory voice he had heard cry out before she had raced around the nose of the ship.

Stuart shook his head, and suddenly sat down weakly in the sand in front of her. He didn't know how long that trip had taken, but all at once waves of nauseating weakness swept over him. He felt that he was starving.

"Ohhh! Poor on hung!" the woman cried, bending over him, touching his pallid face with that impossible bunch of fingers. The touch sent a strange sensation of vitality into him; a vital soothing something flowed from her like a tangible benediction. Stuart was suddenly very glad to have met her. He quietly submitted as she picked him up like a child and carried him through the ruined arch of the great stone building that had lain unseen behind the robot ship until now.

All during that walk through the ruins she crooned to him like a mother to a child. Stuart gathered that to her

he *was* a child, because he was so much smaller and seemingly younger. He fell into a delicious kind of half-waking sleep.

* * *

ALONG the ionic trail left by the robot ship followed the smaller battlecraft of the warrior of the Flame People. Over the landing place of the robot ship he circled, waiting, a hawk calculating the swoop for the kill. But night drew swiftly on, and no movement showed near the dark bulk of the robot craft. In the darkness the red warrior settled his ship softly to the sands, the rolling dunes hiding his ship from chance observation.

Stealthily, the terrible lightning weapon in his hand, he crept toward the robot ship. He watched it for a long hour from the crest of a dune. Then he turned and crept back to his own craft in the hollow between the dunes. From his ship's upper surface a mast thrust itself upward, extending like an attenuated telescope up and up. From the tip of it began to crackle an electric discharge—and Handar of the Flame People spent a long twenty minutes making his report and taking orders for the future.

As he shut off the power of his transmitter, some sixth sense warned him in time to look up as Ra-Lakme brought a good-sized rock down upon his flat head.

* * *

SHE TUMBLED his body calmly to the floor, activated the space communicator, and in a voice very similar to Handar's own, began a further conversation with his contact—the battle fleet somewhere in Space.

Within minutes she had ascertained the position and distance of the fleet by the readings of the instruments, and had effectually canceled Handar's

information by telling them that his first observation of the uninhabited nature of Gard-A was at fault, as he had just glimpsed a considerable group of an unknown type of ship pass overhead. She obligingly copied down the resultant instructions to remain and make a complete survey of strength and nature of possible opposition and brought the interchange to a close.

Examining the fallen victim of her stealth she found that he was dead of a crushed skull, and a sigh of relief escaped her. She could not have brought herself to kill a defenseless and injured man, even one of the warriors of the hated Flame-People.

Taking a bomb from the rack at the gun-port, she set the fuse and left the ship. Later, as Stuart exclaimed at the explosion, she only smiled and said: "Poor an com, comvi on!"

To which Stuart nodded weakly, wondering what was going on to give him such a feeling of well-being. The woman had poured quarts of weird tasting stuff into him—and the effects were amazingly similar to drinking well-spiked egg-nog. He was very full, very sleepy and very drunk.

Time went by rapidly for the two in the dwelling which Ra-Lakme of Narn had made for herself there in the ruins. There was so much Stuart had to learn before he could even begin to understand this woman of a greater, older race. Eventually they could speak together in Stuart's own English, and he had picked up enough of her language to know what she meant. That took months, months in which he wondered why she spent so much time watching the heavens in a certain area—and why she seemed so worried and distraught. She had not seemed so in that first meeting.

He learned she was a member of a very numerous race who lived on another planet at some distance. She

pointed it out to him in the heavens, and showed it to him in the great telescope at which she spent every waking moment not spent with him. It was a dull red star, and over its surface glowed brighter orange and green and red gems which she told him were cities. Case wondered at the size of the cities.

He learned she had come to the desert planet for the express purpose of using the ponderous and famous telescope built by a vanished people—for such a telescope could not be duplicated by any builders today. She had also meant to make a rough map of the planet and chart some of the principal sights of the ruins, but the event of his arrival had curtailed her available time. Stuart gathered that the builders of the great telescope were the same people who had built the robot ship in which he had come.

It was very pleasant tutelage he underwent, learning of this world and the many others she had visited. At last the time came when she must return. Stuart felt distinct tremors at the thought of entering this vast civilization of hers, made up of people in sizes to which his own was that of a child—and of minds beside which he knew his own was even less impressive.

Stuart was sure he understood her when she intimated she was already a half century old by his reckoning; and that she expected to live four times as long, at least. He was very sure her race lived far longer than his own and knew far more.

Yet the words of the faceless man had given him to understand that these people would know what he meant when he told of the attack and gave them the message and the wallet of papers. Yet Ra-Lakme had shown almost no interest, saying the matter was already understood.

So time passed, and Stuart came to know fully who and what this woman was. Her reason for being here was two-fold: first she was a "watcher", to warn her far-off people of the coming of certain enemies; the second was to complete her star studies for her degree—which she called her "commitment".

"Who are those enemies for whom you watch?" he asked.

"One of them followed you here, Stuart!"

"A red-faced, squat-bodied man? A man with a flame symbol on his breast?"

Ra-Lakme nodded, wondering what he knew.

STUART pondered. "The faceless man spoke of the People of the Flame, too. I know nothing of them, except that they attacked me when I was entering the robot ship."

"I killed him. You were sick; I did not speak of it to you then. But now you are strong again. They are members of a terrible horde of warriors who live beyond Aldebaran. They learned how to cause suns to throw out great spurts of heat and kill whole worlds, wipe out life on all the planets around the sun. Novae you call them. The Flame People then return and salvage the wealth of a planet, sometimes of several planets, that have been denuded of life by the sudden flame. Hence they are feared and watched, and every great race that traverses space always watches for the secretive movements of the fleets of the Flame Lords.

"That is one of my duties: to watch for the sudden flares of light in space which tell us the Flame Lords have decreed death to yet another universe; as they once did long ago to the Solar System of which your world is a member."

Stuart felt the chill of the menace of a great people whose power was based upon such a universal dealing of death to worlds, to whole groups of planets in their path. "Is there no way to defeat the Flame People? Are they invulnerable?"

Ra-Lakme gave a negative shake of her glorious head of dark curls. "It is not that they are such brilliant warriors. It is their numbers, and their possession of an endless number of space ships from their loot of universes. No matter how many of their ships are shot down, always more come from their immense dominions of dead worlds—worlds once full of healthy normal humans and other races—now peopled again by the squat red race. I have seen many descriptions, many pictures of their way of life. They are a gloomy, cruel people, who do not know laughter or happiness. They are brought up in complete obedience to their Lords. They never see their masters, who have acquired many mysterious and potent machines and miraculous life-giving secrets from their study of the cities and raped wealth of worlds. The masters keep all these secrets for themselves.

"I know what wonderful mechanisms they have, for I know what exists still on Narn, my own world; things beyond a modern's understanding, machines with which to defend a planet against the warlords of all space. I do not believe the Flame People will ever be able to conquer our capital city, but it is not that we fear. It is their blasting of life from the many planets of life which are tributary to our rule."

"Space is so infinitely vast. How is it that the Flame People don't move on in their path of destruction, beyond return to these worlds?"

"We have watched their paths.

across the night sky, watched the stars blaze one after another into sudden brilliance and fade out again, knowing each time that a planetary system had died. And we know by the trail of fire where the Flame People spread their devastation. The path lies inevitably toward Narn, my home. Too, we suspect that in their search for the ancient works of wisdom, for more and more terrible weapons, the records would point inevitably to Narn, the great planet which was once the foremost of a race now almost vanished."

Stuart wondered, for there was something in her voice that told him she was concealing something.

"Your race is a fragment left from the passing of the great races, then; the same as our own race of Earth?" asked Stuart.

She nodded, and Stuart's heart leaped, for his intuitions told him she was concealing exactly the thing he had hoped to find. That thing, a member of the great race who had built the *woo-wohuh-woo* signal machine and the robot ship and this telescope beside them.

Perhaps, on the planet Narn, a group of the vanished Supermen waited interminably, patiently, for the People of the Flame to come and meet their doom. Something in the strange fire in Ra-Lakme's eyes told him that his guess might be correct. For there was something more than ordinary about Ra-Lakme of Narn. There was a carefully concealed power, that yet had revealed itself to Stuart in the flash of those superb eyes, in the penetrating instantaneity of her mental processes, in the infinitely capable hands, so graceful and so bewildering in their magical ability to accomplish. Ra-Lakme was not what she seemed at first glance, and that was something Stuart was pleased with himself for

perceiving. He had expected to find here a superb member of an ancient race, and all Ra-Lakme's denial of her superiority did not change Stuart's conviction that she was no mere mortal.

"But the man with no face—how is it that he said he was sent to guard me? How did he know? Who was he?"

RA-LAKME smiled, and Stuart knew he was asking things that took entirely too much explaining. "There is so much you don't know! We have vigilant warders everywhere. They belong to an organization to which I myself belong. We hope to bring back the former glory of mankind. When we find such as you springing up among formerly ignorant people, we help. You will become one of us, and work toward the same end. Many of us use the ancient ships to travel among the stars—that is how the man with no face arrived on your Earth. It was your attempt to signal the ancient rescue call that attracted him to you. So you are here, and I am glad you are."

"What comes after?" asked Stuart, anxious to know what more to expect. "How can we, who seem so weak and ignorant, accomplish anything? These People of the Flame will come and destroy any advance we make."

She shook her head. "The time has come to show you, not tell you. I have waited here, and my waiting has paid off. You were followed, and I destroyed the pursuit. I waited, too, to make sure of you, your nature and that you are not a spy. My duties completed, we must go to my home, to great Narn, the central power of the known universe today; the only power which is truly benevolent."

They left the robot ship, only concealing it in the ruins for some future use or for his return to Earth. And

Ra-Lakme took her worn and plain working clothes and burnt them, and dressed herself in a jeweled temptation, so that Stuart found her infinitely attractive.

Ra-Lakme's ship was very large; much too large for two people. It would have been roomy for a hundred.

"We use the best of the ships left from the old-time navies of space, and this one is in very good repair. So I use it, instead of something smaller and more suitable."

It was short hours later that she sent the great ship in a wide orbit about the massive planet, Narn. Stuart gasped as the immensity of the world filled him with fear.

"That planet would crush me, Ra-Lakme! We cannot land upon it."

"But we will land on it, and it will not crush you. I have lived on it most of my life."

However, she did not take him there at once. Instead they landed upon a small, dark satellite which had been her home for some years, since her father's appointment to the Chief's position in the observatory there.

The planetoid swept up beneath them like a ship, dark and roughly spherical. It gleamed softly, and as they neared the surface, Stuart saw a great disk of material slide from before them. The tremendous structure was a roof, opening before them, a transparent roof over the entire little world!

They settled upon grass, among very old columnar cedars. The severe structures were of black stone, almost unseeable in the night. There was a glimpse of tremendous statues, ranged along a vast aisle leading inward; gigantic poised shapes looking as if about to break into some stupendous ballet. They entered this aisle, and Stuart was astounded to note that this statuary did indeed move, changing constantly so as to form continu-

ally new relationships of mass and line, each change more striking and rhythmic than the last.

"What is this place?" asked Stuart.

"It is the most important astronomical observatory of the world of Narn. I live here; my father is the astronomer in charge."

SHE LED him into a series of vaulted chambers, not wholly deserted, since here and there moved the tall figures of elderly people who greeted Ra-Lakme gravely as she passed.

One of these turned from peering into the eye of a bewildering mass that reared toward the transparent roof—and gave a cry of delight at sight of her. Ra-Lakme rushed into his arms and kissed him fondly.

"Ah, Lakme, my child, you have returned much sooner than I expected! You do my heart good; you must never take another journey—it becomes too dismal here without you. And who is this small stranger? He is no bigger than a boy!"

"On his world he is a full-grown man, Father Wierung. He has wakened the long sleeping warning left by the Ancients, drawn down to him the ship of safety from its path about his planet. It brought him to Gard-A, and a scout of the Fire People followed him! They come this way. I sent in my report at once—have you acted upon it?"

The old man clapped a hand to his brow. "Your reports are neatly piled on my desk, dear Lakme. It had not occurred to me that there was any urgency; but of course my secretary has attended to the matter..." The old man turned absently back to his eyepiece.

Ra-Lakme stood aghast. Her warning of the Fire People had been ignored by the old stargazer. She set off at a run, toward a cubicle in the end of the vaulted building. There, neatly piled

beside the radar-receiver were the typed reports, just as her father had taken them from the receiver without consciously realizing anything of their importance. Ra-Lakme seized the piled slips, riffled through them, beckoned to Stuart to follow her, set off at a pace difficult for Stuart to match.

"We must take these to the Council immediately, in person, for action. It may be too late even now! How can I excuse my father? He may lose his post over this! Oh, why did I ever entrust them to him? I thought that he would win honors for making the first report of the approach of the Flame People; instead he fails to notice the messages at all!"

She piled into a much smaller ship berthed near the monster they had landed. Stuart entered after her, to find a space filled with machinery and very little remaining for passengers or anything else. This ship was obviously packed with power, and designed specifically for taking off and landing on the giant planet looming overhead like a red-gemmed disk of ebony, shutting out the stars with its vast bulk. Ra-Lakme dogged shut the door lock, sent the ship roaring upward through the night-shrouded opening in the roof. Stuart found himself pressed against the seat with a crushing force and heard Ra-Lakme's voice as from the top of a well into which he was sinking: "You will have to be extremely careful of yourself on the mother-planet; Earthman! Or you may be crushed by some accident. You must obey my orders exactly for your own safety..."

The great planet loomed closer, rushing toward them, becoming a ruddy gleaming surface, the red color reflected from the city domes. Stuart's heart lifted, knowing that every sparkling stud on that mighty sphere was a city where the ancient lamp of knowledge was still alight.

The Kingdom of the Superman, then, was not wholly dead, and now he was to see it for himself! This was one of its vast, ancient hearts, still beating, still bearing up against the darkness and the evil spreading through the heavens before the fleets of the People of the Flame!

The pressure of deceleration slammed him back into his seat; Ra-Lakme had reversed ends and the drives were at work again reducing their speed. The vast, red-gammed face of Narn blotted out all the sky ahead, rushed nearer with a frightening sense of sure destruction from its giant grasp of gravity.

Stuart didn't feel exactly welcome as the vast circular airlocks gaped for their power-packed ship and they were crushed to a stop against a magnetic field grasping at their hull with terrific force. Then he felt the vibration of some supporting power flow through the hull and through his body as the ship was lifted from its cradle, swung in the air out and down, suspended from a maneuverable gravity-reducing beam. It came to rest among a long line of parked ships.

He struggled futilely to raise himself and failed. The power of this gravity made him almost helpless. Then the crush of it lessened and he eased himself painfully to his feet, expecting his legs to collapse momentarily. Ra-Lakme evidently thought they might, also, for she followed him, watching him as a mother of a child learning to walk.

AWAITING them at the door was a giant at whom Stuart could only stand and gaze in awe. He was a full ten feet tall, but his singularly wide body with its thick legs was compensation that made him seem perfectly proportioned.

Above the thunder of machinery,



Ra-Lakme greeted the giant with a joyful shout, and his answering words were a bellow of sound in Stuart's ears.

"Be careful of my charge," warned Ra-Lakme, as the giant motioned as if to pat him on the head. "He is from a small planet! He stands erect only with difficulty. A conveyance must be brought and the anti-gravs set for his weight. Don't let him get out of his personal vehicle while on this world,

for the sake of perfect safety. I place him in your care—I have important work to do."

The giant nodded understandingly as Ra-Lakme picked Stuart up in her arms and bore him to a couch at the side of the chamber and stretched him out in comparative comfort. He disappeared around huge pillars, off to fetch the car.

Stuart sighed and took Ra-Lakme's hand to express his gratitude. At the



touch of her fingers, he experienced his first real glimpse of what she was coming to mean to him. He knew that she felt it too, for she impulsively pressed his hand to her breast for an instant, her face flushed with sudden embarrassment as if he had peered into her mind, where he should not see. Then she released his hand. But the revealing contact had occurred and each of them was now conscious of the other's affection. Their strictly pla-

tonic relationships had suddenly come to an end. Between them loomed a tremendous and irresistible adventure. The unknown facets of their different natures made the possibility of discovery that much more inviting.

Her blush deepened, and she turned away. It was obvious that she had seen his thoughts, and had been thinking the same things.

After a moment the giant returned, driving a vehicle, the seats of which

were enclosed in a transparent sphere of protection. Again Ra-Lakme lifted Stuart, placed him inside and got in beside him. Instantly a vast relief flooded through his limbs. He could now move normally. Some force inside the sphere nullified the terrific gravity.

They glided off, the giant striding ahead, for the vehicle was too small for all three. "Omitan will lead us to the Council," Ra-Lakme explained.

Stuart got glimpses of the busy city, gliding cars of several sizes like his own, striding giants, smaller people, some children running and shouting, bigger than himself.

Soon they came to a building, entered a ramp that led through a great doorway. They came into a chamber where a group of gigantic men, mostly white-haired and showing other signs of advanced age, sat about a very wide table. They were solemnly watching the antics of several small, active figures upon the table top, which seemed made of glass and to have a curious depth to it, as though that depth were a glimpse into the complexities of other dimensions. At the entrance of their vehicle, one of them moved a hand upon the table and the figures upon it suddenly disappeared. The peculiar depth of transparence in the table top vanished too; it became opaque. Stuart guessed it was their equivalent of television—wondered if he was right.

Ra-Lakme wheeled their small car up to the side of the table, which proved to be some six feet high, and the giant who had stopped the figures reached out and opened the door of the car, assisted Ra-Lakme to alight.

"Welcome to the Council, Lakme! And how is your revered sire? Engrossed as ever in the problems of the distant rims of the universe, no doubt, to the eclipse of all near and present things?"

Ra-Lakme smiled graciously and answered: "Father is well and sends his respects. He regrets that he is too busy to attend. He intimated that since you know his opinions so well, any one of you can do his voting for him."

The giant graybeard gave a snort of laughter and brought his great face down on a level with Stuart's and peered at him quizzically where he remained inside the wheeled vehicle. "And who is this midget friend of yours, dear Lakme? Has Cupid at last felled you with one of his potent arrows of love, or are my aged intuitions failing me?"

RA-LAKME blushed furiously, and Stuart found himself agape with embarrassment. How had the old giant discerned so correctly and so swiftly? But Ra-Lakme rose to the occasion with pretended rebuke in her voice. It was obvious that she and the Council were more than just friends. "This is the man of whom I spoke in my despatches, but I suppose none of you ever got around to asking father for the information you so officiously demanded I send you regularly when I left here! Your negligence has perhaps cost you much—perhaps our world and the lives of our people!"

"Eh? What is that?" asked the giant.

"This midget of whom you make such a joke arrived at Gard-A, followed by a scout, a spy from an approaching fleet of the People of the Flame. He came to warn us. I was, of course, on hand to receive him. And I instantly made report—but of course no one would think that little Lakme would report anything unusual! So my important messages have been ignored by you, which has cost you many weeks of time. We *could* have prepared for the approach of war!"

Stuart noted with an inward grin

how cleverly she had shifted the blame for her father's negligence to the Council itself, and admired the thrust which would save her father his honor and his position.

"Eh? The fleet of the Flame Lords? Bearing toward Narn? Give us the details; we must take action at once!"

Ra-Lakme frowned at them disapprovingly. "Now you want the details! For six weeks I have thought you had the report, while it lay unnoticed by the radar where my father so carefully placed it. A neat pile of my daily reports, one on top of the other; and no one has even sent for them, least of all, *you* who ordered the daily reports. Am I a member, or a child? Is my work recognized as important or is it something to keep me out of mischief?"

The hand of the mild-mannered giant wagged at the angry Ra-Lakme futilely: "Now, now, child! There, there, Lakme child; I admit everything you say, and will try to do better, only don't begin to cry!"

Stuart almost laughed aloud now. It was obvious how Ra-Lakme was the darling of these old men, and how she wrapped them around her little finger. At once he felt more at home with them—they were no different, after all, than any old man of Earth.

Ra-Lakme smiled, apparently much mollified. Swiftly she made her report, incisive and businesslike now. Stuart noted that as she spoke, an automatic secretary, a tall box with several screened orifices, had been activated, and was recording every inflection and meaning of her voice. Ra-Lakme spoke directly into it. When she finished, she turned, to see that the Council was once more absorbed in staring at the small moving figures on the table, evidently with the utmost fascination.

Ra-Lakme's face took on a look of hopeless exasperation, and she bowed

her head. Stuart was sure there was the glimmer of a tear, a real one, in her eye now. Apparently several of the supposedly preoccupied giants noticed it too, for they rose ponderously, peered in at Stuart, patted Ra-Lakme's shoulder affectionately and returned to their seats. One of them spoke with an air of peroration: "Ah youth! I wish I were young again, to believe the golden age could be revived! It must be a fine feeling to be so energetic."

Ra-Lakme flamed up instantly: "Will you of the Council please awake from your pleasant dreams and your playing with toys and realize there are duties and tasks and ideals to be upheld and made real? The future struggles to be born; and death threatens to obliterate it before its first beginning for lack of effort on the part of such as you! Ah age! Could youth but have your power, your knowledge, and lack your pessimistic gloom!"

A CHORUS of delighted bellows and guffaws greeted her now. Stuart realized at last that such arguments were a much enjoyed part of every meeting between themselves and Ra-Lakme, and that actually they had been extremely attentive to her report, and were but prodding her to get the fire of her reaction. He marveled at the greatness of these people, who could retain their humor even in the face of the greatest of all menaces rushing down upon them.

"Then tell us, dear Lakme, what you would do, had you the power and the knowledge?" asked one of the giants. He smiled behind his palm at the others. And he bent a peculiar glance upon Stuart too. Stuart wondered at it.

Ra-Lakme answered: "The world from which this man comes has had two world-wide conflicts, with millions of dead, in his lifetime, and it is now

upon the verge of another. He probably knows more about war and destruction than all of us put together, who have been at peace so long. It might be well to listen to *him*."

Startled, Stuart saw the great heads turned toward him, and waiting for him to speak. He found himself shouting at them, his voice still ridiculously puny in his ears beside theirs.

"Wars are won by what is called total mobilization of all manpower to war production. Have you issued orders for armament construction? Have you thought of bringing your battle fleet up to peak efficiency, of replacing all obsolete weapons? Order total mobilization of all able-bodied men for your fighting force! What else can you do to meet this threat of war? Will it be possible to get ready in time? *They* are ready—they are a warlike people! They may be in position to strike at Narn tomorrow with bombs from space! Can you stop these first bombs before they reach you, and give you time to counter-attack?"

The great heads were together now, trying to whisper a word or two that Ra-Lakme and Stuart would not hear.

Ra-Lakme, went into a fresh burst of castigation. "What are you whispering? Is it that you think he is wrong? I bring you news of an invasion of your most-feared enemy and you turn your backs to whisper. I should, perhaps, have rushed off to Earth with my news, where they are more accustomed to accepting warfare and the news of war, more ready to go into action as this Earthman bids you do!"

The oldest member of the Council in appearance, a venerable giant with a silver beard, held up a hand and Ra-Lakme was silent.

"Dear Lakme, you must make allowances for our apparent decrepitude. Long habit has made us slow of decision, grave of thought. We will reject neither your warning nor your small disciple. But how do we know that both he and your warning

are not the same despicable false thing, originating in spying work of some kind? How do we know he, too, is not an emissary of the Flame Lords? Did he not arrive closely followed by their agent? Perhaps he is here but to pick out the most valuable areas, those parts they wish to leave untouched by their fire for loot afterward? In due time, after he has passed his tests, he will be given all opportunity to earn our highest trust and greatest rewards. But all in good time! Meanwhile be assured that we have been alert for ages, and will not now be caught unprepared, however short the time be until the attack begins."

"Then why toy with me as you do with those toys on the table?" said Ra-Lakme. "Don't keep me in suspense for lack of knowledge of your actions."

"It is because we love you, Lakme," said the giant gently. "Every bit of your youthful fire is life and blood to us. Would you deny us the full display of it?"

For answer Ra-Lakme leaped upon his lap and flung her arms around his great neck. She kissed him resoundingly on the lips. "No, you old dear," she said. "If it is fire your old bones want, there is some for you! And now, to business, my wise ones!"

Once more out of the building, Ra-Lakme took the controls of the car and threaded her way through traffic to where the giant Omitan waited. Thoughtfully, Stuart asked Ra-Lakme: "What device was that they were using when we came; the little living figures on the glass table top?"

"I think it is but a scientific toy they are forever using. They make a great mystery about it and let no one but themselves play with it."

"I do not think it is a toy," he said. "I could not see very well, but to me it seemed that at least some of those tiny figures had no faces!"

Ra-Lakme knit an eyebrow over a thoughtful eye. "You are right! How stupid they must think me, not to

realize they have a purpose to all they do. No wonder they laugh at me!"

"I don't believe they think you stupid," he said. "They are very fond of you."

"How do you know that?"

"They call you Lakme. Everyone else but your father calls you Ra-Lakme."

She parked the vehicle now in a secluded courtyard and as he moved to follow her, pushed him back on his couch-like seat. "No, you may not leave the vehicle. It is too dangerous. Get some sleep now, while I go for food for us."

She backed toward the opened oval of the vehicle's doorway and gave him a swift, glittering smile that seemed somehow tender. "You may call me Lakme, too," she said. Then she was gone and he sank wearily upon the cushions and was soon fast asleep.

* * *

NOW TIME began to move swiftly for Stuart Case, after the first shock of strangeness had worn off. Ra-Lakme rushed him from place to place in the enormous city, and he learned the meaning of the tests the Council had hinted he would have to pass. He learned also of Lakme's secret plans to give him the benefit of the discoveries of all the top minds of a science of health completely mysterious to Stuart.

He received injections of several violent-hued fluids. He was subjected to induced sleep, during which his mind was probed, and at the same time many vital adjustments made in his physical processes by means he could not remember—perhaps because he did not understand. Many long records of sounds and meanings and experiences he could not label with mere English words whirled in his memory afterward. He moved in a constant state of awed wonder and fearful expectancy of some new and more perilous treatment inflicted upon his

already different body. He waited for the time when his mental feet would reach a solid ground of understanding—and knowing it would never come.

He was surely changing from a weakling to a strong man, from a mental slowpoke to a person of quick and accurate mind, to one who was never at a loss for words or the confidence to use them. He no longer felt his own lack of size among these giants; it was unimportant to them how big or small he was—and so it proved to him. These changes swept over him so rapidly that he could not even keep track of them. His pale skin changed to a rosy hue of perfect health, his hands broadened and lengthened, an exciting growth seemed to have occurred in his body. He could almost feel the bones stretch.

He was nevertheless vastly surprised to perceive that he was no longer diminutive and weak beside Ra-Lakme. He reached above her shoulders, and if his eyes weren't level with hers, they were at least level with her lips, which proved quite as good. His hands no longer looked like the hands of a little child beside hers, but rather like the strong hands of a small man. He no longer felt toward her like a stranger, but he did not care to analyze his true feelings. He only knew he did not want to have to part from her, and feared that he must soon.

Ra-Lakme had become his constant buffer between his own startled amazement at this world of hers and the impact on his struggling mind. She explained, she cajoled, she coaxed, she kneaded at him like a stubborn piece of clay, changing him beneath her hands into something of which she daily exhibited greater pride as she stood beside him in his meetings with the medical wizards, the mental examiners, or the machines which gave back little numbered cards into her hands when

he stood before them.

At last she said: "Now you are ready for your final tests before the Council, and above all, show no fear of them. They are only men like yourself."

THEY CAME to the same place in the Council chamber and stood before the same strange table with the transparent top where the little figures moved and the great-bearded oldsters watched them. But this time Stuart walked beside Ra-Lakme to confront them. Omitan, as before, accompanied them but this time came inside.

Ra-Lakme offered her candidate, and the admiration on their faces as they first looked at him was very good to see. Stuart was proud for her, too, and certainly he felt that he was more of a man than he had been. One of the giants wheeled out a mechanism with which Stuart was already familiar, and it began to discharge cards into his hands. He nodded approval at each one, but suddenly an interruption dramatically terminated the tests.

The air about them suddenly crackled with a signal from the etheric communicator in the top of the dome city—received from another world: *"The heavens flame over Speira! Half the planets of the Zayana drift are ablaze! The path of the fleet of the Flame is a curve which will parallel the orbit of Narn within ten days, and intercept in thirteen. Message corroborated by triple check. That is all."*

Stuart and Ra-Lakme found themselves ignored. The Council turned from them, and the glass table became a view of space instead of a puppet show. For a second there could only be seen the sprinkling of stars, stars which grew rapidly larger as the giant hand turned the focus to greater magnification. Stuart saw that Speira was a dark planet swinging about a small double sun, and that beyond it

was a star cluster of some dozen suns. Even as they watched, a small spot on the screen burst into flame, a flame that began as a small prominence of brightness on one side of a planet, spread rapidly over the whole area, flamed brighter until its brightness was greater than any other star on the vision surface.

A sigh escaped the giant, Omitan, windily: "The death of the race of Kogur, and of the Elani. The cities of Emerald and Gold and the wonderful temple of the Blue Feather are no more!"

Ra-Lakme's voice came almost with a sob: "It was such a beautiful world, and so ancient a one. Its people were beyond our own wisdom and deep culture, loving art more than power. Now they are struck down without a chance for life!"

Stuart watched, and an hour went by in horrified suspense as the little new star flamed out brighter and brighter, then began to die down again to a lesser brilliance. Even as it began to decrease, another flamed, nearer and brighter.

"How swiftly they approach!" Stuart cried out, marveling at the immense distance between the two flames newly hung in the heavens. "Will we be ready to stop those bombs?"

The graybeard whom Stuart accepted as the head of the Council, turned from the screen and depressed a large button at the side of the table. His face was a study in sorrow and it was evident that up to now he had hoped not to have to give that alarm.

An ominous siren began to shriek in some far place, then another and another, farther and farther—until a terrific shrieking of many vast metal throats made the air unbearable with their terrible warning.

War!

RA-LAKME faced her two companions with a sigh. It was later, at her quarters. "I am not really in the confidence of our Council. There are military groups who are now, in time of peril, really the ruling power. Unless they order evacuation of this world, we will not know what they plan by way of defense until we see the enemy ships."

Omitan grumbled. "When we see their ships, Lakme, girl, it will be too late to do anything but die. Until that time, it seems we must trust to others for our defense. But I don't like the feel of that! If a man could do something, feel he was making some effort of his own..."

"Must we wait *here* to go into action?" Stuart asked.

Ra-Lakme looked at him, a light in her eye. "Omitan! There is something we can do, you and I and Stuart and your workmen..."

Omitan turned with comical swiftness, his big mouth opening to question her, but she signed him to silence and led the way to the car, outside. They got in and drove swiftly. As they raced along, Stuart could catch but fragmentary words of the conversation Omitan and Ra-Lakme fell into...

"It is hidden in the sands of Gard-A. I blew up the ship, but the communicator seemed to me to have possibilities, so I removed it first. We can learn much, just by listening. You take your salvage crew, and all salvage equipment. We may get a chance to take over some wrecked warcraft and so get into the battle, whether they want us there or not. There is no law against privateers that I ever heard of. Just because we are not part of the Grand Fleet, just because you do not have a commission from the Board of Space Flight Supervision, just because you are Omitan, who dabbles in all things and is master of only his few hirelings, must you refrain from

defending your own people from an invader? Omitan, there are many things we can do! Many of your inventions have been turned down by old Sobodias! He is jealous of other scientists..."

Omitan nodded his vast head in approval. "At least we can see what's going on in the diamond lenses of the great telescope there, better than any minor lens we can obtain here. And there's no harm in listening on your borrowed receiver. There might be no harm in trying out a few of the weapons that were turned down as too perilous..."

Ra-Lakme's voice, urging: "We'll only be in the way around here, now that they're really going into action. Out there, with no officious controllers to censor even our thoughts, we might conceivably strike a blow..."

Stuart laughed at them both. "It seems to me that you are trying to talk yourself into something illegal. Don't try so hard. If staying on Narn means we'll miss the big show, I'm for getting out of here right now!"

Ra-Lakme laughed at him delightedly. "We'll have a grandstand seat on Gard-A. Here we would only hear about it! Out there we can hear just as well, and see too. Besides maybe we can take a crack at some of them."

Omitan was in deep thought. "I was thinking, Lakme, we might man some of the ancient weapons on Gard-A. Of course it would mean the end of us. They'd drop one of those super-infective fire bombs of theirs, and we would go up with Gard-A."

"Surely there must be some sort of defense against that bomb, Omitan. They seem to be so much a one-weapon fighting force, it might be that if you could stop that bomb, they would be utterly beaten."

"Who knows, Lakme? Few ever live to tell of it who have seen the Flame Fleets operate. I have some ideas, but

it's such short notice. I wonder—ah! Well, I'll try it. We'll go, Lakme. It may mean my expulsion from the Council, who will think I should remain here in dull conference, while all the action is out there—but so what?"

THEY REACHED the vast salvage plant of their giant companion and Stuart was impressed with the mechanical appearing litter about, great dynamos in various stages of dismantlement or assembly, and at least one hundred figures busily working, making a long vista of laboring complexity impossible to analyze.

As they entered this bedlam, the big fellow gave a commanding bellow of complete unintelligibility. The workmen stopped, laid up their tools, swabbed their hands, gathered about to the number of eight or ten score—and each of them quite as large as Omitan himself, though less urbane of aspect.

Omitan began a harangue, using many words and phrases incomprehensible to Stuart, but he got the gist of it:

"Cease all other work, ready the big salvage ship *Esther II*, load all salvage equipment for immediate flight. We are going to Gard-A. What we do there will depend upon our ingenuity, and upon the equipment we take along. I plan to try out the N-Ix weapon that the War Bureau refused, the X-50 grenade thrower with the atomic grenade, and the new needle-cutter we've been experimenting with for cutting up the old hulls in the Thian dumps. There are several other gadgets we've tinkered with that can be made into weapons in an emergency.

"Load everything up; we are setting up shop on Gard-A, which will soon be the scene of the first Thian battle with the Flame People in the known history of their aggressions.

"We are going to do ourselves some good before one of their super-bombs gets through our defense and wipes out our world. If we hang around here, we'll be impressed into the military service to repair damaged hulls for the war fleet—if any get back to Narn, which I doubt. If any of you don't like the idea, you can run to the Council and complain that I am throwing off authority and starting out as a privateer..."

Stuart and Ra-Lakme watched as Omitan's mechanics and space technicians of various grades muttered together, then suddenly gave the big fellow a rousing cheer. Then they went into action, smoothly, but with a bewildering speed, to move a mass of equipment into the side of a heavy craft that lay tipped on its fins in the rear of the big hangar. The whole place looked like what it was, a master mechanic's junk shop, a hodgepodge of dissimilar apparatus from a dozen different periods in the history of the Thian race stretching back into dim antiquity, from twelve to twenty thousand years.

Within short hours the salvage ship had been lifted on anti-grav beams and set in place in a tube of rock pointing upward. The strange assembly of equipment had been stowed, and they filed aboard, a crew of grimy giants, many of them full twice Stuart's height and three to four times his breadth.

* * *

THE TRIP to Gard-A was uneventful, but filled with a mystifying bustling and hammering and fitting. Omitan and his huskies spent half their time in intense discussion, luddling over the tangled masses of complicated devices incomprehensible to Stuart.

They made a rather bumpy landing

quite near Stuart's first landing place upon this desert planet. Omitan and his men redoubled their already Herculean efforts, transporting the masses of machinery into the bowels of the vast ruin that housed the ancient and still marvelous telescope.

Stuart, for want of better employment, assisted Ra-Lakme in carrying her own rather formidable array of gadgets to the base of the towering telescope. There she arranged her instruments and went to work, presumably to locate the present location of the Fire Fleet; and presently she gave a cry of emotion midway between dismay and discovery.

Omitan and Stuart sprang to her side to peer into the bubble of crystal which acted as the ocular of the immense tube. They saw a fleet of dull red ships, stretching out of sight, a ribbon of advancing forms, a hundred ships across the ribbon. This immensity of war strength stretched beyond vision. At a guess there were a million war vessels and more beyond sight.

"There is the secret of the Flame Lords' invincibility," Ra-Lakme said in despair. "Their infinite numbers smother all opposition. We can have no slightest hope of overcoming any mass of migration like that! This is not war; it is the migration of the most numerous people in all the universe!"

Stuart attempted to estimate, counting across the vast band of the fleet, giving five hundred men to a ship, squaring the number by the possible number of ships—and gave an "ouf" of astonishment at the astronomical figure resulting.

A sudden flash of fire across the mirror of the telescope brought Ra-Lakme and the two men to attention. They saw a lone ship with a great white star glowing on the prow, loom up. It was very near and above them,

and gradually its vast shape eclipsed their sight of the distant Fire Fleet.

From its prow a lance of flame flickered again, sped across the vast space still separating the enemy from it. Stuart, watching the progress of the beam, estimated the distance at somewhat the distance between Earth and the Moon. The fiery beam of force raked across the whole width of the foremost line of the invaders. Where it touched, each prow glowed feebly, but there was no other result.

The invaders paid no heed to this tentative "shot across their bows", only increasing speed so that the gap between themselves and their following craft widened, to permit wider dispersal.

THAT FIRST ship of the White Star above them was followed by another and another. Stuart lost count as the friendly ships of Narn sped overhead, but guessed that over five hundred had passed before the procession ceased. If this was all the Thian fleet, this all the ships sent to stop that terrible invader by the planet Narn, if the city-states of Narn could muster no greater force than this—their defense was but foolhardy daring, and not calculation or wisdom. They could not number even one per cent of their enemy's strength.

Again that foremost ship of the White Star lashed out at the enemy fleet, another kind of ray, a blue crackling beam leaping across the still void between. At its touch the red Flame ship jerked, seemed to shudder inwardly, and tons of fragments erupted outward from the huge nose. The opening thus exposed gave a view of tiers of decks, falling figures by the score. The whole front end of the ship had been blasted away.

The ship veered, lost weight, dropped from the path of flight, but

turned in a wide, controlled curve and moved slowly toward the rear. The fleet moved on exactly as before, and again the deadly blue ray leaped out at them.

This time a coruscation of fire leaped about the foremost ships. The blue ray broke into a crackling display, but the pyrotechnics did no damage. The Flame People had made some change in their defensive force screens.

Stuart paled. "I suspect we will soon be dead, Lakme—if that is the best we can do. I am sorry not to live. This has been a fascinating new life, and knowing you has been the very best part of it. I love you, Lakme, and you might as well know."

Ra-Lakme blushed. A smile swept over her infinitely expressive lips. But she did not turn her face from watching the ocular before them. She whispered: "Don't commit yourself too readily, Stuart. I am considered a homely woman among my people. The fleets are just feeling each other out with minor weapons; the major ones are not yet in evidence. All this means nothing. The Flame Lords are a one-weapon military machine. Their fire-bomb is a weapon against which there can be no defense by its very nature. It is a weapon only the most callous and brutal could use. Only the Flame People could care so little for life as to destroy whole worlds in one breath.

"They will sacrifice half that fleet just to get near enough to place one flame bomb upon old Narn. And that will be the end of Narn and all her cities. But not of us, Stuart. We can yet flee with Omitan when the cause is lost—if it comes to that. But it is not yet lost!"

Omitan had come up behind them again, stood watching the opening action of the White Star fleet against the ships of the Flame Lords. His

huge bass voice was choked with anger as he rumbled: "May they be as numerous as the sands of all the seas, and as strong and as old as time itself, yet will their ships drift empty, every one, before these hands cease working against them. We will not flee!"

The terrific emotion of the giant so near beside him was like a sudden flash of the light of wisdom into Stuart's benumbed brain. He saw all at once how these people felt at this invasion, and that Omitan meant his melodramatic words to the hilt. A glance at the broad hands of the giant gave Stuart a sudden chilly feeling that it was quite possible this Omitan might be able to do what he said.

Omitan bent and muttered a few words close to Ra-Lakme's ear. She turned to a bit of apparatus close beside her. It was very different from the other mechanisms about, being of golden metal and very slight and fragile. She dialed a series of numbers on the tiny dial, depressed a key, and spoke into it:

"Oh Masters of the People of the Flame, hear this! Turn back, or be utterly destroyed! You near the sacred area of Thian, the most ancient of all peoples. This is your last word of peace before we avenge a venerable grievance!"

A long minute went by, and Omitan was very busy beside her, attaching leads to a square, flame-colored metal box of starkly utilitarian appearance. Stuart did not know it, but this was the communicator taken from the Flame ship which had followed him to Gard-A. It was attuned to the receivers of the war fleet of the Flame.

To the Earthman, it seemed that Omitan was attempting to bluff the Flame Fleet by intimating that some

hidden force of the original dwellers still waited here, and to him it seemed futile. It was evident that only superior force would convince that colossal armada of anything.

TWO MINUTES swept by, and the little receiver beside Ra-Lakme crackled with the Flame Lords' answer.

"Oh voice from nowhere, we know you are not what you pretend. You are but chaff which will blow before the flaming wind of our wrath. Surrender now, or be consumed."

Stuart wondered idly what the commanders of the White Star fleet overhead thought of this intrusion into the crucial meeting between the two vast fleets. He guessed that Omitan was now not only A.W.O.J., but also barred from authority by the Council on Narn. He knew that their departure had been secret, that their orders, sent by the military heads, had remained upon Omitan's work bench unopened. The giant had remarked: "What we do not read, we cannot disobey."

Now Omitan was roaring at the flame gold of the enemy apparatus: "Listen, then, Lords of the Flame, to the voice of our great leader who wishes to give you peace..."

The giant, his wide face flushed fire-red and his eyes sparkling with a kind of wicked anticipation, signaled with one big hand as he talked to someone in the distance. His other hand waved "come on" to an approaching figure. To Stuart, he did resemble a demi-god come to life, for there was a vast confidence and a grim-deviltry about him that was more than human. The workman, broad as Omitan himself, hunkered down beside the other, attached two leads from some apparatus in the background. Stuart watched as power pulsed visibly in glowing waves along

the new cables, violent waves of a force which affected him with a weakening, a trembling and dizzy fear—an awe, and in his mind he heard a vast chorus of terrible voices, like the angry singing of angels, chanting a thrilling war chant of angelic vengeance. Suddenly he saw what Omitan had done.

He had placed a record of positive interest-catching significance upon the communicator. They would hear what seemed to be the armies of the vanished great singing as they prepared to go to war. He could hear the tremendous harmony and godlike wrath, and guessed that to someone who knew the true past, as these "Lords of the Flame" must know it, the effect would be terrifying.

Ra-Lakme had turned from the telescope ocular to a series of gadgets she had lined across the workbench beside her. She was listening there to some received signals with a helmet on her head. Then, she turned, her eyes caught Omitan's questioning glance. She nodded, her never lovelier face flashed a great smile of success to Omitan. He grinned broadly and put his hand upon a switch. Ra-Lakme held up one of those expressive fingers of hers, then quite abruptly passed the finger across her throat with a cutting motion and Omitan pulled the switch.

Stuart fell over backward getting away from the sudden terrifying crackling that the device before him gave. His head hummed with shock and despair and fear which were not his own, but from the crackling vibrations. Omitan broke into a great laugh and detached the pair of smoking hot cables. Ra-Lakme listened a second longer with her helmet, her hands on several adjustment levers. The workman returned his wires to his apparatus and wheeled it away.

The stunned Earthman got to his

feet, looked at Omitan accusingly. He should have been warned. The giant clapped him on the back, roaring with laughter.

"We just sent enough vibration over that wide contact beam to give them all a case of nerves they'll never recover from, eh, Lakme, girl? Hah, play back the recording you took and let's see if they are thinking of future tactics. I want to see if they are changing course before I send up a joker for them."

Ra-Lakme tapped a little winding bobbin, and Omitan detached it. Presently they were listening to the thought of the Flame People, which Ra-Lakme had been recording upon their beam contact with the fleet communicators.

It was a very greedy and confident thought, somewhat incomprehensible in the mass. But still one could make out the reactions to Ra-Lakme's words. Fear and unbelief and awe, then increasing belief as they heard the angel chorus. Then suddenly across the whole pattern of the listening minds came a flash of terrible panic, of destroying fear—and an ensuing silence as if the very foundation of their thinking processes had been cut down. At this silence, the faces of Ra-Lakme and Omitan assumed a similar grim satisfaction.

STUART turned to the telescope viewer bubble, and gave a cry of delight which brought Ra-Lakme and Omitan to watch, too. The great ribbon formation of the advancing fleet had forked off in two prongs, to encircle the fleet of the White Star. But something had gone wrong. The prongs had suddenly begun to waver. The foremost ships veered and plunged as if a dead hand were at the controls. Thousands of ships were careening across the heavens in mad misdirection. The vast distance be-

tween ships made collisions impossible, but the scene made it evident that at least two thousand great fighting ships contained, if not dead men, at least mad men!

Omitan roared: "We struck a blow, Lakme, love. We hit them! They were *all* listening to our entertainment, and those nearest received our little joke in strength!"

At the sudden confusion, the fleet of the White Star saw opportunity and shot forward. Still at too long range for full destruction, they lashed at the careening ships with the blue ray which had proved so deadly at first, but the defensive screens were still functioning and they did little damage. But they plunged on, through the confused formationless advance guard, and came to grips with the body of the ribbon. Like a great snake it was, the two forks of its tongue now suddenly no longer venomous. They passed the fork and struck at the head.

"Good, good," muttered Omitan, "they've the sense to pass up the stricken and close with the uninjured. Lakme, I must go to work. Call me at once if our forces cannot drive them back, if we begin to fall before their weapons."

Ra-Lakme nodded, and Omitan moved off at a ponderous gallop to join a toiling group about a curious contrivance which reminded Stuart, from the distance, of a pile of power transformers held together by a framework of glittering glass rods.

"How is it," the Earthman asked Ra-Lakme, "that Omitan is so ingenious and so far ahead of his friends?"

"Omitan is a salvage expert, a calling now almost extinct since the Thians have ceased to travel space to the extent they formerly did. Other scientists of his technical capabilities are usually specialists, but a salvage man must combine knowledge

of all the specialties with a working practicality. He must be able to repair any type of ship, out in space where facilities are limited. There are few like Omitan, who must be at once inventor, repairman and scientist, at once an astronaut and a builder of makeshift apparatus with which to replace damaged parts of salvaged ships. When he has nothing else to do, Omitan has made a habit of overhauling the ancient dumps, places where the past great race threw broken and unwanted machinery, and from such dumps he has retrieved much of our lost knowledge of the mechanics of the great race."

"What is that thing? It looks like a cross between a metal octopus and a dismantled power station." Stuart pointed at the curiously complex array of power units at which the giant toiled with his men, hooking cables and the glittering glass rods from one unit to the next.

Ra-Lakme smiled. "It is his adaptation of the magnetic space mine and the automatic ray rifle to the problem of piercing the enemy's force screens." Ra-Lakme's hands gestured with that infinitely expressive grace of hers, so that her fingers did more talking than her flexible lips. Stuart watched as the one hand made the motions of a ship approaching the balled fist of the other hand, which opened suddenly and made the motion of firing a gun.

"He will launch that pile of seeming junk into the path of the enemy fleet. It travels under its own power—the drive apparatus you see at the rear. When an enemy ship nears its path, its magnetic drive control directs the mine toward the enemy ship. As the force screen meets the force screen around that device, it gives off a surge of neutralizing power and fires the ray mounted in the center simultaneously. Then the auto-

matic drive zooms it away again. It is entirely automatic, and I wish we had ten thousand of them."

"How does it avoid our own ships?"

"It is selective, tuned to the peculiar vibrations of the enemy screens."

The vast array of ships above had drawn out along two wide paths, the original fork tactic of the Flame Fleet being followed out. The battle was in the form of a great Y in the sky and the fleet of the Thians was nestled into the mouth of the Y, fired upon from two sides, but maintaining a compact order and plunging on and on into the mouth of the serpent.

Now, suddenly, from each fork of the serpent's tongue came glowing, speeding torpedo shapes which seemingly attached themselves to the force screens of the Thian ships, giving off great sparks of fire.

Ra-Lakme gave a cry of dismay. "The fire leeches! They will never cast them off!"

STUART watched, his own heart in his throat. The fiery shapes, drawn to the power of the force screens, hung upon them, increasing in brightness as the fire in them came to its full dreadful potential. One by one the ships to which they attached themselves dropped back, letting their unstricken fellows pass on, and turned, trying by sharp maneuvers to cast adrift the source of the killing heat and radiation—and two or three of the hundred or so attacked did manage to throw them off by a simple change in direction. But the others could not detach the deadly things, and one by one their screens blinked out, the fire sprang to the metal of the ship, and they drifted helplessly as the fire raced over the whole body of the ship. Stricken, they hung there, a hundred bright stars of death, atom-

ic fire eating at every part of them.

Ra-Lakme screamed for Omitan, but the giant only waved a hand, his huge red face bright with excitement as he went on with his feverish work. The mass of apparatus was finished now, and was being guided to the mouth of a launching tube that went up through the roof of the building above them. Stuart saw the crew of workmen race away from it as it lifted up on a tower of fire and out of sight in the tube overhead.

Stuart watched it as it came into view in the telescope view-ball, ascending with incredible acceleration, flashing up toward the distant enemy. Then Omitan came to the telescope and gave a great bellow of rage as he saw the hundred stars of death that marked the end of the White Star fighting ships and their valiant crews. "You called them fire leeches?" he asked Ra-Lakme. "Then you have some knowledge of them?"

Ra-Lakme nodded. "I found it in the *Cabularia* of Dewar, Volume 97. But I suppose our so great leaders have never perused the *Cabularia* of antiquity."

"Have you notes of the thing in your possession, girl? The details may give some hint of a defense."

"No notes but my memory," Ra-Lakme said. "There were diagrams of defense repellents, but as I recall the defense had to vary with the type of attractor used. That is, some kinds of negative charges will not repel some kinds of negative charges, and vice-versa—it was too complicated for me. And the ancient books are on Narn."

"No time," rumbled the giant. "We will have to suffer! I couldn't help them now, even if I knew how to stop them. Look at my little auto-rifle travel! If only we had a thousand, Lakme, they'd be put to some trouble! I must devise something on

a vast scale..."

"Omitan!" said Stuart suddenly. "I know where an idea might exist!"

"Where, little man?" said Omitan, whirling upon him.

"The ship that brought me here—it has a robot mind constructed by the ancients, and it can tell us a great deal, I am sure..."

"Lead the way!" roared Omitan. "That robot can tell us more than you realize!"

Stuart led the way to the sand-drifted chamber with a caved-in roof where the ship was concealed. He knocked on the round door with a bit of stone, and at the sound, there came a whir and a vibration of awakened generators and the door slid somewhat noisily open. He stepped into the cubicle of the lock, followed by Omitan and Ra-Lakme.

Beyond the lock, the interior was exactly as before. The glowing mass on the pedestal regarded him with complete detachment, only giving a little "Oh" of recognition at sight of him. Stuart moved close to the sphere, for the radiations of the thing were very stimulating, and began:

"My friend, do you know of the battle? That the Lords of Flame have attacked this ancient people, the inheritors of those who created you, long ago?"

The robot gave a little pulse of light and a whir of reaction as it adjusted some connection or retimed the speed of some spinning generator in the hidden interior of the ship. Then it answered in that pulsating flow of perfect thought forms that served it so much better than speech.

"Yes, Stuart Case, I know. But you should know that I am constructed in such a way that I cannot enter into battle, for I am unable to harm a living creature."

"I was thinking," Stuart explained, "that you might come to where my

friends labor and advise them how to defend themselves. They seem very puzzled as to what to do with a thing called a fire leech which the enemy uses to destroy the Thian's ships."

AS AN ANSWER the ship rose gently under his feet and glided to the area where Omitan's workmen labored. The laboring giants halted in consternation at the sudden appearance of the ship until they saw Omitan in the airlock. The ship settled down and Omitan returned to the interior. He looked at Ra-Lakme.

"You're our mental expert, girl. Here is a mind that could fight and a ship to fight with. All you need is to remove the ancient block placed there to keep the robot from harming a human. Teach him to destroy only the Flame ships and I will give him a weapon with which to do it. Can you?"

Ra-Lakme let her hands flex into a backward arch, singularly feminine, and then the fingers clenched, the tips rubbing against each other like tiny small serpents in love and nodded. "I understand how it is done. If the robot is willing that I change his nature from static service to dynamic origination, I must remove a certain bit of metal and replace it with an alloy. It will be possible to give him a dominating impulse to destroy the flame ships."

The robot made an answer. "It will be very interesting to assume a new character, friend Lakme, but you must promise to return me to my former state of mind upon request—if I make that request."

"Granted." She smiled at the glowing mass and in seconds she had shut off the power in the base of the pedestal, gingerly removed the globe, and reaching in, removed a tiny block of black metal. This metal she placed

in a little drawer in a cabinet on her bench, and from the same drawer took a similar block of gold color. She treated the new bit of metal with a vibration from her own apparatus, which to Stuart seemed to resemble the stimulating rays given off by the robot's own power. The golden block began to glow. It was retaining the energy within itself. After testing the block with a meter, Ra-Lakme placed it in the same position in the globe, and curious it was to the Earthman to look into the inward parts of the mind of the robot whom he knew as a living personality. To look into a mind and see, not flesh, but many interlocking bits of material and coils and little mechanisms resembling the disassembled parts of many watches hung upon a framework of diamond-bright bars of metal.

The new matrix inserted, Ra-Lakme once again energized the robot and asked: "Do you feel a difference?"

"Not greatly. I feel as if I had forgotten something, some inhibition; I feel more energetic and free. But it is still myself, and I would not harm a fly if I could help it."

Ra-Lakme took from her cabinet of little drawers a tiny spool of wire which she inserted in an augmenting mechanism. The ray from the orifice of this machine she directed upon the glowing globe of the robot's mind. Stuart heard the spool turn, begin to speak:

"The Flame People, who have destroyed the ancient great, are now about to destroy their descendants, we who would bring back the vanished beauty and peace. They fear us, for we will grow too strong, so they strike us now! How can any creature send a whole world to death? What are they? If only some living robot who remembered the Ancients' power and goodness would awake and re-

venge their destruction..."

Stuart realized it was a specially made record of her own thought, designed to sketch in the motivation the robot mind needed. For he was built to serve a certain race, and should respond to an impulse to defend them, even now, so long after they were gone.

After minutes of repetition, Ra-Lakme shut off the record and turned questioning eyes upon the robot.

FOR THE first time the strange metal creature showed emotion. Its voice quavered. "I feel remiss. I know now that I have neglected my true duty. I have been a defective mechanism, or I should long ago have hurled myself against these Flame People. I will help you now. I will fight as you would fight, if you could."

Ra-Lakme gave Omitan a glance that said she thought the robot was ready, and Omitan began to work on the task of fitting a dozen new weapons upon the little robot ship, and to wire in the controls for the weapons, delicate work with the type of circuits employed in a ship every function of which was under the control of the robot's rather small power output.

Omitan was delighted with the opportunity presented by the little robot craft, and his men kept chuckling to themselves over some humor in the situation visible only to themselves. Possibly it was because they were able from such promising materials to manufacture these potent weapons—and to visualize what was going to happen to the Flame People when the ship got aloft.

The ship was equipped with a collision screen, standard for most ships of its time; it repelled any small fast-moving object from before its path. Omitan adjusted this screen and in-

creased the power by installing heavier generators to make it perform as a ray-defense screen.

There had been no weapons on the original craft. Omitan installed first a simple tool of their trade, a metal-cutter, mounting it on the bow forward of the close-fitting energy screen. It was on swivels, stuck out ahead of the nose like a grotesque horn. This was a needle-beam which could slice through metal instantly—but its real purpose was to cause a strain in the defense screen of any craft ahead of the robot ship.

On the top of the ship he installed a rapid-firing mechanism which tossed a tiny object resembling a hand-grenade of Earth. Stuart was told the grenade was a small replica of the dreadful fire-bomb which these Flame Lords used to devastate whole planets.

While a grenade thrower would be useless in such long range warfare if gravity was present, in free space such a device could throw a small object for hundreds of miles, since the object was weightless. This device was aimed so that the path of the tiny bomb coincided with the path of the needle-beam cutter. Omitan was sure the grenade would penetrate the defensive screens of the Flame ships.

Watching, Stuart breathed a prayer to some vague sublimity that Omitan's work would prove the turning factor in the terrible struggle in the skies. He knew that Earth's future was being determined by that conflict, just as much as the future of many worlds the Flame Lords would destroy in their endless conquest.

No one but the Flame Lords had ever ventured to use the awful destruction of the Flame bomb for war. If but one drop of that active atomic infection reached a planet, that planet would become a star!

Stuart felt it was utter justice that the Flame People's horrible weapon should at last be turned against themselves, out here where the only body of any size was the desert planet of Gard-A. He did not know that it was Ra-Lakme's false message, reporting Gard-A as a heavily fortified planet, that had brought them here; here where they thought no one else could use their weapon with immunity.

Still one more device Omitan attached to the exterior of the little space craft. It resembled a great clock. The dial was nearly six feet across, and the body a cylinder of nearly the same depth. Stuart saw that it was something adapted to its present use, that once it had perhaps been some type of huge, complicated time device.

STUART listened as Omitan explained its use to the robot, who waited silently but with a certain tenseness evident in the rapidity of its questions and replies.

"It is to be dropped in the midst of the enemy fleet. Then get away from it as rapidly as possible. It has tremendous destructive range; and I have no way to estimate its effect upon you, a metal brain. It may destroy you, and us too, but we must take that chance. It is a powerful generator of a certain thought pattern. The motive power of the device is itself atomic, and immense beyond conception. I know this will destroy the minds of every warrior of the Flame Lords who hears, will destroy every mind in that fleet, with luck. It is similar to the blow we struck through their communicator beam, but infinitely more augmented in potential range. It is timed to give you several minutes to escape its range, then it will start generating the mind-destroying wave. Like telepathy it-

self, it penetrates any material.

"This is not an experimental weapon. The principle has long been known and used in the magnum etheric communicators, but never before has it been adapted to destructive use. I know this will kill. You must place it behind their fleet, where they will be within its range and our own fleet at the farthest possible point. Only vast distance will weaken the force. It decreases only by the diffusion from its center of the radial force lines, you understand? This alone can win the battle and the war, if you place it correctly. Otherwise it can destroy us as well."

The robot expressed an almost human eagerness to go into action, and showed complete appreciation of the potentialities of the thought weapon.

Ra-Lakme, who had left her work at the scope to see the robot mind off to battle, moved forward into the ship, spoke to the robot. "We should also tell you this, friend out of ancient time: The destructive thought pattern has two phases, in this thought-bomb. One phase breaks down the mind by impregnating the hearer's mind-cell-film with great electric potential. But, in case that is not sufficient, we have added a command record to the device. Due to the immense power of the thought-bomb generators, this command message will go out to the fleet and cause the hearers to attempt to detonate their only escape from the area of the bomb itself, you must also escape from the vicinity of every Flame ship or you perish."

The robot made a kind of mental obeisance to Ra-Lakme. "I have no fear of death. I am only metal and not flesh, Ra-Lakme. It does not matter to me. I will place this bomb, and *you* will survive. Goodbye."

The robot had seen the record of

the effect of the similar wave sent out to the Flame Fleet, and the possibilities of this new device were thrilling to it. Stuart watched the glowing mass through the still open doorway, feeling strong friendship for the strange machine. He felt sorry that his friend must take off alone to do battle with the vast fleet now encircling the White Star fleet above, maneuvering in a rapid vortical encirclement to crush in upon the relatively diminutive opponent.

AS THE robot ship began to glide slowly past him the still open door seemed to invite the Earthman. Stuart felt a lump in his throat as at the loss of a living friend. On a sudden irresistible impulse the Earthman leaped into the slowly closing opening, found himself within the little airlock chamber with the acceleration increasing to a painful point. The robot was wasting no time, had turned on the lifter force full strength, pinning Stuart helplessly to the floor.

The Earthman hammered weakly on the inner door of the lock, and crawled slowly through on his knees as it opened. He lay there before the pedestal of his robot friend, weakly waiting for the acceleration pressure to decrease. The metal mind was not pleased.

"You will retard me, weakling of flesh! You are a mortal of most non-essential mentality, yet how could you be so unwise as to enter this ship of destruction? Without you I can maneuver at velocities which no creature of flesh and blood can survive. Thus I can easily out-maneuver all the Flame Fleet pilots, who are of flesh and blood. So I had a great advantage over them! Now, with you aboard, I am whipped before I start, as I can maneuver no more rapidly than they, or else you would die!"

Stuart heard the stern thought-voice of the seemingly exasperated robot with a sinking heart. He had been a fool. He murmured: "I have been a fool, friend robot. I like you, and I hated to see you go into battle alone. I thought that in some way I might be of use. But I am of no use. It is the same in the laboratory of the great telescope. They have no real use for me. I am but in the way."

The robot clicked and muttered, then seemed to change its attitude. "However, dear pilgrim of a lost world, you can be of service, though you cannot expect to survive the experience. I don't expect to, and I am certainly of tougher material than you. They have neglected, in their haste, to hook up the electronic device which was to trigger the grenade thrower. You will be able to serve as the trigger-puller! If you will take your place in the firing seat of the device, I will tell you when to fire. But you should be able to see when it is time in the screen provided for my use."

Stuart nodded, and the little ship again began to pick up acceleration. They shot up and out into a darkness lit by many circling points of flame, as the robot sent the ship around the little planet into the shadow.

The seat at the firing screen of the grenade gun was padded, but was not at all a completely protective device as was the suspension hammock. The robot was speaking again in Stuart's mind.

"We will make one pass at high speed directly through the center of the fleet. I must travel at such acceleration, at a velocity that will kill you instantly if I am forced to swerve too greatly from a direct line. If I can hold the ship to superficial curves you will survive. As we pass beneath each great Flame ship, you will have one fraction of a second to

fire that grenade. It must be done precisely, or our effort will be useless. The purpose of the grenade is merely to distract and to open a way for us through the fleet to the heart of their reserve force. You will note that the greatest part of their number has abstained from battle, that the Star Fleet is engaged by only a quarter of the enemy numbers. They would get in their own way if more were sent against us. When a ship becomes centered on the cross-hairs of your screen, press the firing lever. The red glow you see preceding us on the body of the enemy ship is the cutting ray which will open the force screen before the passage of the grenade of atomic fire. Are you ready?"

The Earthman shivered a little. This was like diving headlong into a gantlet of certain death. If the enemy didn't get him, the robot's determination to avoid destruction would cause him to swerve—and one swerve too-wide would mean Stuart's death. He pulled in an uncertain lungful of air. Between set teeth he whispered, "Let 'er flicker!"

THIS ROBOT took himself awfully seriously, Stuart was thinking. He seemed to feel he was a little better than flesh and blood just because he was tougher. He would show him that a flesh and blood mind could accept death quite as calmly as any robot.

"After we have passed beyond the position of the attacking fleet, we will plunge headlong into the great waiting mass of the Flame Lords' reserve fleet. When we have reached the center of that roughly circular formation, I will release the thought-bomb and accelerate fully. *At that instant you will die, Earthman!*"

Stuart, irritated at the mind's insistence on this detail, growled angrily: "So what? Everybody's doing it lately. Let's get it over

with. Immortality hasn't done *you* much good. Get on with it!"

Stuart felt that though he had not been invited on this mission, he could at least be granted the courtesy of understanding that he was not afraid of death. He felt very foolish just being there, knowing the robot looked down upon him. Men must die so that better men can live after them and he was willing to die when it became necessary.

But the robot went on talking, even as the speed began to build up and the pressure nearly blacked out the Earthman. "You have a chance to destroy many, many flame warriors in their great ships before you die. They have destroyed whole races, infinite numbers of beings far more worthy of life than yourself. For countless centuries their course has been pure aggression. Make the most of your opportunity, Earthman!"

Now suddenly a herd of buffalo began to stomp on Stuart's stomach with sickening thuds. He knew that the robot was lying to him, for he had cut the drive and was coasting into battle in a series of curves and zig-zags, weightless. Glancing into his screen, Stuart saw the maneuver was necessitated by the fact that a great battle cruiser had placed a barrier; a great lance of blue fire swept in a fan of destruction before them. The opposing ray-man had purposely swept his beam in a path almost impossible to avoid, directly across their straight-line course.

But the scene was blotted out by the sudden loom of a great Flame symbol glowing on an immense prow directly ahead. The robot had swept in a curve placing him in firing position just beneath the bow of a warcraft. The necessary speed of reaction was infinitesimal. Instantly the cross-hairs intersected directly upon the Flame symbol, Stuart pressed the

firing lever, felt the little dip of his ship as the recoil mechanism took the shock, was vastly surprised to see a tiny flame blossom out brilliantly over the big circle and flame on the bow of the warship. Then the vision was gone, the seat slammed into his back as the ship's drive went on. The pressure increased to a terrible pain.

Then on his screen another ship loomed, the cross-hairs sparked his mind to action. He pressed the lever, watched the flame blossom on the dull, ugly shape of the enemy ship—and as swiftly disappear. There was not time to determine the final effect of these tiny bombs. He hoped they were as effective as Omitan had promised, but did not feel at all sure that such a tiny blow could harm the mammoth war vessels at which he fired.

Now they were in the thick of it, and crashing across the field of vision came ray after ray, vast beams of crackling destruction which narrowly missed the tiny, darting craft, spearing across the line of vision blindingly. He formed the habit of turning his head away until the blindness was gone, then turning back with clear eyes to see again another vast shape loom near, to press the firing lever and see the instant blossoming of the tiny, infectious flame on the huge bulk. He felt somewhat like a small bee, buzzing about among a herd of mammoths, stinging at them with his poison barbs, to dart on as they lumbered ponderously out of his path.

He was full of a kind of despairing excitement. This was his last short breath of life, and he was living it to the full. His breath came like fire in his nostrils, his hands were like unfeeling metal upon the firing levers. At every new tiny flame placed correctly beneath the belly of the huge enemy ships an ecstatic sen-

sation of triumph swept over him. As each great beam lashed out at them, to be avoided by the instantaneous reactions of the metal brain, Stuart felt exultant as if he himself were guiding the tiny bit of destruction that was their speeding craft. At each new blossom of fire planted by his hand, this exultation increased until he was shouting aloud, incoherently, wildly.

A GAIN THE ship screwed wildly right and left under his buttocks; again the big bulge of the ugly bow of a Flame ship; again the vengeful blossom there directly upon the big Flame symbol—where it belonged, he thought savagely. Let them worship their flame when it burned their own ship from under their feet! To Hell with the Flame Lords and all their warriors. He'd give them flame! They had come asking for it—now they were getting it!

Now they crossed through an area where the great White Star ships, hemmed in on all sides, fought savagely to survive. The robot sent the little ship darting in and around the huge warships. Almost at once the area was past. They were plunging on and on into a thicker concentration of enemy vessels. The blue rays lashed at them constantly. For a second the Earthman blacked out as the robot screwed the ship around a bunched fan of rays that attempted to form a pocket of death before them. This ship was faster than anything they had, but how could they ever escape those swift, lashing beams of death? They seemed to be piling up ahead.

Stuart did not realize the consternation they were causing in the Flame fleet, that the whole fleet had left battle formation and was trying to converge between themselves and the distant group of the waiting reserve. How could he know that the great

Lord of Flame was waiting there ahead, surrounded by his invincible millions? How could he know that this legendary figure was supposed to be immortal, a God whom the abject warriors of Flame worshipped with utter devotion? How could he see into the great black flagship of that fleet, where a figure so cowardly it never allowed itself to be seen, a figure of a creature as old as Time, wrinkled and hideous and horrible as death itself, cowered now, suddenly feeling the doom it had meted out to thousands upon thousands of great civilized worlds—feeling that same doom approaching, a thing as tiny and elusive as a flea, speeding on and on through the worst barrage of fire they had ever been forced to lay down before an enemy?

Nor could he see the exultation of the giant, Omitan, watching from the telescope on Gard-A, could have heard his huge palms whack his fellows on the back as he bellowed: "Look at the little devil go! Did you ever see such slaughter dealt by such a small thing to so large a victim? Hah! If we had a dozen such craft, no power existent could overcome us."

"If he could hear you, Omitan," Ra-Lakme's voice cut in, "that Earthman who is out there fighting with the robot could accept his inevitable death more easily. Such a valiant little man he is! He could not have known that you forgot to connect up the grenade-thrower, but see how he is making up for your oversight! It does make one remember that all men are the sons of Gods..."

"And I felt a kind of resentment of him, looked down upon him as an inferior," said Omitan sorrowfully. "Hoh, if we could get him back now! But he is sure to die when the robot lays his biggest egg." He turned back to the telescope. "Look how he always places his grenades

directly upon the Flame symbol on their bows!" He slapped his fist into his palm in savage rhythm to each grenade that Stuart was placing.

They watched the vast fleet of the Flame Lord now beginning to fall into confusion, the tactic of encirclement of the White Star fleet abandoned. Hundreds of their craft had blossomed out into flame and turned into drifting ash and the rest were praying the order to retreat would soon come.

AS THE ROBOT craft whirled sickeningly under him, taking a new course, Stuart felt his backbone trying to ram through his skull. But he remained conscious, feeling the strong thought of the robot tug at him, stimulate him. Again and yet again he pressed the firing lever as the dull glow of the cutter-beam marked out the spot where the screen went down before its power.

The robot had built up his speed, his course now a long undulant curve up and over the main fleet doing battle, and toward the reserve fleet where their prime target, the Flame Lord himself was. Up and over and down and under. Like a wavy line of blue fire, dotted at the peak of each wave by one of Stuart's flaming periods, they shot on and through the mass of the fleet.

Suddenly, calm and sweet as rain, came the robot's thin thought voice into Stuart's mind. "Brace yourself, brave little Earthman, and goodbye. We are at the dead center of the enemy concentration. I will release the thought bomb, and then apply full acceleration to escape it. I am sorry that you must die."

Stuart shouted: "Do it, robot! I am ready!"

That was all that Stuart Case knew. He went into darkness as the robot piloted the ship up the ladder of velocity into speeds beyond seven,

beyond eight, beyond nine gravities.
And no man can survive...

* * *

RA-LAKME carried the broken and bloody thing that had been a handsome young Earthman out of the returned robot craft in her own arms, weeping. The giant, Omitan followed, his great hands ready to do anything possible, but certainly there is little can be done for a corpse.

But examination revealed the pulse still feebly active in the heart, and Ra-Lakme knew that bursted veins and ruptured arteries can be healed—if the flesh could be kept alive and nurtured meanwhile. She immersed him in solutions to cause healing to progress at an accelerated rate, and used stimulants to keep the unwilling spirit captive. She worked hard, performing miracles...

But for days she despaired of saving the mind, for the brain was ruptured out of its envelope, and the twin globes half crushed within the fractured skull.

On Narn, the whole citizenry knew of the Earthman's deed and many and deep were the sources that came forward from obscurity, many were the ancients who helped Ra-Lakme give life to one who should by ordinary count be dead.

The Earthman was very young, and time passed. There came a day when his eyes opened and he looked up into the weary, soft, wet-lashed eyes of Ra-Lakme of Narn. Her voice came to him from a distance, sweet with pain, bitter with knowledge, beautiful with an agony that was for his agony.

"Oh my love! The time has been so endless, and my heart has lain in my breast as crushed as your poor body. Your robot friend is overcome with remorse to have harmed his best friend—but we gave him strict command to return with his own in-

valuable memory in good shape. There was no other way to escape that terrible destruction."

The Earthman found his lips moving weakly. He knew he lived, knew he was full of unbearable pain from every part of his crushed body. "Lakme! I didn't want to lose you, but I had to help some way. I had to strike at them!"

"Of course, dear heart, being you, there was no other path. But think of it no more. I will tell you what you have done, then you will sleep and get well. Later you and I will go to Earth and bring what wisdom we may to your people."

"The robot and I—what did we do? Are they turned back, the ships of the Flame Lords? Is the ancient and wonderful world of Narn still existent? Did our fleet win the battle?"

Lakme smiled tearfully, her voice full of emotion as she spoke. "Your passage through the battle area cut the encircling fleet into two parts. Our fleet crashed through after you, completed the separation, attacked one arm and destroyed it. The other part took to flight, to join the reserve fleet. Ours pursued, but at a distance, expecting some counter action. It was at that instant, as the fleeing ships neared the reserve fleet, that the thought-bomb took effect. Most of the Flame Fleet was instantly unmanned, their crews stricken senseless by the terrific force of the mental wave. On the rim of the fleet, those not rendered unconscious received the second-phase command and detonated their bombs. Vast explosions bloomed out like stars—stars of terror and death to the Flame People who lived to see them.

"The surviving ships, now as few in number as our own, took to immediate flight. Our ships still pursue them, hoping to learn in the end where they come from. Somewhere

they will catch up with them, and that will mark the end of the power of the Flame Lords forever!"

Stuart sighed, his chest full of pain as his breath came more and more rapidly. But his brain felt awake and clear and happy. His eyes were filled with Ra-Lakme, her arms were about him, her wet cheeks touched his. He knew, as his weakness drew him into sleep, the fruits of victory were his. He knew that he had tasted more true

success than any man of Earth had won since... the forgotten deluge, and before.

"Lakme," he murmured, out of the darkness of sleep.

She stroked his face with tender fingers, delicately touching each terrible bruise, each ugly line of fracture. The tears of happiness on her face dropped softly on the exile who had found a home in her heart.

THE END

WE'RE NOT ALONE!

by

FRANK CAIN

ASTRONOMERS are optimistic. Since there are so many stars, possibly as many as ten to the fifteenth power in the Universe we can see, the chances of other Solar Systems existing are remarkably good. And since astronomers are almost certain there is a definite form of plant life on the planet Mars, there is reason to suspect there is life elsewhere in the Universe.

These views are a far cry from those of only a few years ago, when men were so egocentric that they couldn't conceive of life existing anywhere but on Earth. Now the opposite stand is being taken—it would be extremely strange if ours was the only planet which housed that odd array of hydrocarbons which we call living

things.

This new attitude constitutes a more sophisticated view of the Universe. We know that the elements are everywhere the same, and the stars are made of the same things that our planets and Sun are. Just on the basis of pure chance alone, there should be hundred of thousands of planets with conditions similar to our own. Even if this is not the exact case, life in other stranger forms may exist. To science-fiction readers this is old hat, but it represents a major alteration in the opinions of most astronomers who have been inclined to be conservative on this point. Whether or not we'll ever find life outside the Solar System is one matter—but we know it's there!

WHAT'S THE BIG ATTRACTION?

by

LEO LEWIN

THE MEANING and nature of magnetism remain among the world's great unsolved problems. And though magnetism is one of the oldest scientific phenomena, it is still little understood. From the time man played with natural magnet of iron ore (lodestones) through the invention of the compass to modern electromagnetic technology, magnetism has not been a very well understood subject. Especially is this true of the Earth's magnetic field. And the reason for finding out about it is that in it lies the answer to some basic physical problems—problems which ultimately will affect the nature of matter.

The lines of force on the Earth's surface have been plotted and charted in detail and it is known how they vary. But the variation of the magnetic field within the Earth is little known. Some experiments have been conducted at the bottom of deep mines. But these are unreliable because of the surrounding metallic ores. At present there is an expedition being fitted out

in Denmark which plans to conduct the world's most extensive survey of the magnetic field in the depths of the ocean.

A four foot spherical shell of non-magnetic bronze has been cast with four inch walls. Laden with recording instruments this will be lowered at the end of a steel cable to depths of the order of five miles. From these measurements some knowledge of how the Earth's magnetic field varies with depth will be learned. In turn this information will be given to theoretical physicists like the famous Blackett whose specialty is magnetism, and he and his cohorts will attempt to get more real clues to the basic causes of the phenomenon. This in turn will lead to greater knowledge of the magnetism of the atom which is caused by rotating electrons.

The subtle shell that divides magnetism from electricity needs cracking before physics can go on. This expedition has high hopes of succeeding in introducing the wedge that may give the answers!



It was certainly a potent potion: a new personality was rising out of Bummy's body!



GOT TO BELIEVE

One after another, Bummy took over the bodies of four successful men. But he overlooked one detail: fortunate people aren't always lucky!

BUMMY pulled the collar of his tattered overcoat higher around his neck to keep out the cold November wind and turned west on Madison street. He had managed to cadge a quarter from a small town McGee on his way to the Northwestern Station, but if he stuck around any longer the cop in front of the Daily News building would rap him once or twice with his nightstick just for luck.

Besides, the only trains running in the early evening were the commuter's specials, which meant that the McGees

would be in too much of a hurry to dig up a dime for him.

He juggled around inside his coat, trying to avoid the hole that let in the chill wind and the few drifting flakes of snow. It had been the kind of bleak, gloomy day that made you wish you were a respectable joe with a nice warm home and a bed with clean sheets and blankets that didn't smell like they had just come from the horse barns. A respectable joe, like Evans J. Browne who ran the small detective agency in the Clarkson building and wasn't above flipping

quarters to Bummy when he was handling a good divorce case. Or Joey DeJack, alderman for the First ward, who was good for maybe even a single when elections rolled around.

Bummy huddled down further in his coat and gazed distastefully at the dancing white flakes. It was almost the time of year to heave a rock through a plate glass window and let Judge Gutcheck send him to the House of Correction for the winter.

He fondled the quarter in his pocket and took refuge in an open doorway to figure out how he should spend the night. He could get a full pint of wine for fifteen cents and have a dime left over for a pick-me-up in the morning. Or he could wander over to the *Rec-pent and Be Saved* rescue mission for a bowl of soup, a fairly decent bunk, and a night of hymn singing.

He idly practiced a few notes deep in his throat and had almost made up his mind for the mission when his eyes strayed to the sign in a store window across the street. He read it once and then read it again in an absent-minded way, trying to figure out what seemed odd about it. It was a junk shop window, filled with odds and ends of stuff that nobody wanted or could use anymore, and the sign did nothing more than advertise that fact. He read it again and suddenly realized what it was.

At the bottom of the sign was written in crayon: "We also sell magic charms, love potions, guaranteed spells, and conjure rituals. For the connoisseur. Prices reasonable." It was a good gag, bound to attract a lot of attention.

Bummy rubbed a stubbled chin in thought and then turned to go down the street to the mission. A few steps away he stopped and stared at the sign again. His hand caressed the quarter and then hastily drew away. That quarter was worth a good bowl

of soup and a bunk with blanket at the mission.

HE HESITATED a moment more and then crossed the street and went in. On the inside a few flat tables were piled high with junk and rubble that dribbled onto the floor to make small mountains of discarded lamp shades, broken bric-a-brac, small bronze-cast statues of the Spirit of '76, copies of comic books and the old Physical Culture, umbrellas minus handles, cracked and discarded chinaware, a beaded curtain that had seen service in the early 1900's, and what looked like Mr. Singer's original sewing machine.

Bummy slouched over to a pile of frayed and discarded magazines and had just begun to investigate the exploits of a comic book hero when a harsh, remotely feminine voice broke in:

"Comics are two for a nickel and those with covers three cents and if ya wanna browse, go to the library!"

The voice went with a fat, hawk-eyed, frowzy old woman sitting at a desk toward the rear of the store, half-hidden by moldering piles of merchandise.

"I ain't browsing," Bummy said sullenly, mustering all the hurt dignity he could. "I'm a customer." He felt the quarter in his pocket. "A cash customer."

The old lady snorted. "Any time I see a wine head with money! Well, what did you want?"

Bummy felt his courage start to fail and wished he had never come in. "I—I saw the sign outside."

"So what does that prove?"

"It says you sell magic charms," Bummy said, feeling foolish.

"Oh." A pause. "I see. Won't you step toward the rear of the store, please?"

Bummy stepped hesitantly toward the

back, wondering just what he had said that had made the old woman halfway civil. In the rear of the store was a set of shelves, loaded with bottles and vials and small bamboo boxes. Some of the bottles contained what looked like dry grass and flowers and others had things in them that made him wish he hadn't looked at all, and still others seemed filled with shimmering things that glowed and twisted and hurt his eyes.

The fat old woman eased her bulk out from behind the desk and came over to the shelf area. "Anything in particular you got in mind?" she asked. "I have love potions, curses, magic spells—practically all the stock that the union will let us carry. If you want something special, maybe I could order it for you."

Bummy thought for a minute. He didn't believe a word of this and he hated to think of parting with his quarter, but the old woman kind of frightened him. It was hard to look her in the eyes...

WELL, WAS there anything in particular he wanted? He thought of the cold outside and the musty, coarse blankets at the mission, or maybe nothing better than a sheet of newspaper in an empty lot. Then he thought of Evans J. Browne and Joey DeJack, nice respectable people who amounted to something, people who had made a success out of their lives...

"I want to be a success," Bummy said.

The old woman brushed aside a straying strand of gray hair and looked at him rather thoughtfully. "Success is a pretty hard thing to define, Bummy, but I think I know what you mean. Not everybody likes it, though, and most pay a pretty steep price. You're sure that's *what* you want?"

Bummy nodded emphatically and the old woman sighed and turned to the shelf. "What you need is Success Potion Number 5," she said. "You can become anything you wish and be a success at it. Directions are right on the bottle."

"How much?" Bummy asked.

The old woman looked at him rather sadly. "Success is worth everything you own, Bummy—for you, twenty-five cents."

He paid the quarter and clutched the vial possessively, when suddenly he thought of something. "If this stuff is any good, how come you ain't downtown selling it to the swells for all kinds of dough?"

The old lady snorted. "You move downtown, Bummy, and first thing you know all the dailies in town are doing features on you showing you up for a quack. They wouldn't believe anything anyways."

She moved toward the back of the dimly lighted store. Bummy would've sworn that her features somehow seemed softened and much kinder, but that was probably because of the shadows.

"And you've got to believe, Bummy," she added. "You've got to believe."

ONCE OUTSIDE, Bummy began to wonder. If the stuff did what it was supposed to, it was worth far more than a quarter. And come to think of it, how did she know that he only had a quarter and that his name was Bummy?

He shrugged. He had blown money on stuff that was a lot more foolish than the vial.

He slouched away and started to amble over the Canal Street bridge. It was early evening by now and most of the cops were off duty, so he wouldn't get chased out of the Loop. Maybe he could cadge another quar-

ter from a McGee hurrying for a train. Sometimes when they were in a hurry they'd pay just to get rid of him. It was cold and windy and somewhere along the side of the Civic Opera House a poster of a pretty girl flapped and rustled in the gusty air.

Bummy jammed his hands in his pockets and then stopped and pulled out the small vial. There was a label attached that had on it in neatly typed letters: *Success—four doses.*

He clutched it in his hands, torn between throwing it away and actually trying it out. There was little likelihood that it contained anything more than colored water, and yet...

After all, he had wasted a quarter on it. Besides, it might even be alcoholic.

He uncorked the vial and sniffed it and was mildly disappointed. Well, if he was going to use it, what should he be? Millionaire, Big Tycoon, President, or what?

The display in a book store caught his eye. A stack of books was neatly arranged in the window, apparently a novel of historical interest featuring a young, high-bosomed girl with definite appeal. Bummy blushed on inspecting the dust wrapper more closely. He read the printing on the wrapper in disbelief. No one human being could have done everything the heroine was credited with.

Something stirred in Bummy's memories. A long time ago, when he was young and full of dreams, he had tried writing. Poetry, little stories, stuff that had accumulated in his trunk, moldered, yellowed, and finally ended up as padding in the bottoms of his shoes.

That's what he'd be, he'd be a writer. Somebody who wrote serious stuff, somebody who could turn out the Great American Novel.

A blast of chill air blew in the hole in his overcoat and Bummy hastily

put the vial to his lips and gulped.

"You've got to believe," the old lady had said. And in his heart Bummy believed anything was possible.

IT WAS still early evening, still November, still cold, and the air was still filled with white flakes. But there was a difference. Bummy felt as warm as toast.

He slowly corked the vial and went to drop it in his coat pocket. The pocket was down a little bit from where he expected to find it and there was a flap over it, made of some smooth, warm material. Bummy stared down and then moved into the light from a street lamp to look himself over.

The old lady had told the truth at that. The potion had worked.

He was neat, he was very neat. He could have stepped from the pages of *Esquire* or modeled for a full page ad in *Apparel Arts*. His overcoat was a smooth camel's hair job with patch pockets and a short belt in back.

He unbuttoned his coat and inspected his suit. He could, of course, have guessed it.

Coarse, very British tweeds—slightly baggy at the knees.

His teeth clenched tightly on something and Bummy knew it was the stem to a pipe. He felt around in his pockets and finally came up with a small, expensive leather pouch filled with tobacco. It was a foreign, exotic blend of the very best Turkish leaf.

His pants pocket revealed a nicely tooled, alligator leather wallet, and Bummy slowly leafed through its contents. There was a nice sheaf of green bills, more than Bummy could ever remember having seen at one time. A few cards listing addresses, a photograph of a girl who seemed vaguely familiar and whom Bummy hoped was more than a passing interest, and a few postage stamps that had stuck

together. In very neat, conservative script the identification card said: *Clayborne Harlee Poindexter, Esq.* In equally neat printing the address was given as an apartment on East Oak, on the near North side. Bummy knew, with a rather pleased feeling, that it was in one of the most ultra-ultra districts of Chicago. It would, undoubtedly, be a very, very comfortable apartment.

Besides just the clothing and his sudden acquisition of wealth, Bummy felt different physically. He was considerably heavier than he had been, a little softer and more pale—even walking the streets and mooching was a form of exercise that had kept him from being altogether out of shape—and a little in need of a gentleman's girdle. He felt a few uneasy pains in the vicinity of his stomach, but these he dismissed.

Bummy looked at the card again and idly wondered, since he was now Poindexter, what had become of the real Poindexter. He thought about it and chuckled. Deep inside there was a confused, frantic feeling. The ego of the real Poindexter was still present but he, Bummy, was definitely in the driver's seat. The real Mr. C. H. P., Esq., could come along for the ride, but there wasn't going to be any back seat driving.

All in all, not a bad transition. From a hungry, tattered specimen at the very bottom of Mr. Henry Wallace's ill-fed, ill-clothed one-third, to a well-tailored, obviously talented, and very pleasantly-heeled gentleman.

Bummy felt a nice glow of self-satisfaction and slowly buttoned his coat. The evening was still young, he—as Clay Poindexter—had money, and it was time for dinner. A fashionable nitery, in front of which he used to stand forlorn and famished until the waiters chased him away, came to mind.

He smiled lightly to himself and started up Madison street, his shoes making a satisfactorily solid sound on the sidewalk.

BUMMY stood outside the night club for a minute, trying to recapture the hungry feeling he had had so many times before. At the door a head waiter bowed low, made a quick appraisal of his wealth and social position, and personally showed him to the best table in the house.

It was a step up from Callahan's hash house or even the nourishing but unappetizing food the mission served, Bummy thought. Definitely a step—maybe even a whole flight. The linen was crisp and clean and the napkin harbored no stray animal life. The water in his glass sparkled attractively and Bummy could feel the pangs of hunger.

And he couldn't help but notice that he was being noticed. Heads bobbed together at nearby tables and he could feel others turn around to stare at him. Bummy, as Bummy, was a little self-conscious. Bummy, as Poindexter, was greatly pleased.

It was fun ordering from the menu, too. Steaks and chops and creamed vegetables with exotic sauces. He carefully selected a modest native burgundy to go with the dinner and Cherries Jubilee to top it off. The meal was beautiful, almost too good to eat. It looked like a spread in *Good Housekeeping*. Somewhere deep inside, Poindexter seemed to be protesting, but Bummy ruthlessly suppressed him. He was just about to touch the french fried onions on the steak when somebody slipped into the chair opposite him.

Bummy looked up and the man showed a small press card. "I'm Donley from the *Trib*, Mr. Poindexter. Thought I might get some items for my column." He gestured at the

spread on the table. "Didn't know you were going in for steaks. I thought..."

"Yeah, I know," Bummy interrupted. "It ain't nothing like they serve at the mission, but—" He stopped and reddened. How did a successful author talk? He felt Poindexter's ego struggle within him and decided to let him have the reins.

"Sorry, Donley," Bummy continued, with a note of condescension, "just thinking of a slangy character in my new book. Carried me away for a moment. I'd love to give you some items for your paper, but it looks like I'm going to be busy for a while." A tall, rangy brunette had started across the dance floor to their table. Bummy nodded familiarly to her, recognizing her as the girl in the photograph. "You know how it is—can't live with them and can't live without them," he said, in an aside to the reporter.

Donley took one look and then started to move away. "And if you monkey around with her, Buster, you won't be living at all," he said, half to himself.

Bummy could sense trouble a mile away, but Poindexter knew the girl quite well and it would be awkward to pretend that he didn't know her. And after the first few minutes, Bummy was utterly charmed.

Her name was Coco LeMayne, she adored authors, she adored Poindexter in particular (and by association, Bummy), she adored his latest book, and she would adore knowing him better, which latter could be arranged.

And the best part of it was, Bummy thought after she had left to table-hop elsewhere, all this adoration had taken only five minutes. His meal was still warm.

He took his knife and cut slowly into the steak, watching the juices bubble from the meat. He could almost have used his fork.

And the first few bites brought on the aching, shooting pains in his stomach that told him he couldn't touch any of it.

He put down the knife and felt the tears start to his eyes. Well, the potion had guaranteed he'd be a successful author, so naturally he'd be subject to their occupational diseases.

He gestured to the waiter and sorrowfully watched him take the meal away. He couldn't eat it.

There wasn't much you could eat when you had ulcers.

THE MUSIC was soft and pleasant but not so pleasant that Bummy could drift back to sleep. He slowly opened his eyes and located the music as coming from one of those alarm-clock radios, the kind that turn on at the time for which you set your alarm. The music stopped and a briskly enthusiastic gentleman came on with a series of setting-up exercises. Bummy turned him off in the middle of a knee-bend and started to drift back to sleep.

He drew a deep breath, rolled over, and then suddenly was wide awake. The sheets felt considerably different than the coarse burlap he had been accustomed to and the blankets smelled sweet and clean. The junk shop and the potion and his being an author had been true—were still true. He sat up and ran his hand over the smooth sheets and stared around the apartment. It was tastefully, expensively furnished with a rug whose nap was at least two inches thick; generously overstuffed, richly upholstered chairs, and gleaming, natural finish throughout the room.

He was still in paradise then, and it was morning and time for the milk and honey.

Breakfast, Bummy made a face and sat dejectedly on the edge of the bed.

He knew what he would have. Milk and buttered toast with maybe a dish of oatmeal. He'd not only have it for breakfast, he'd have it for lunch, and whether he liked it or not—and he didn't—he'd probably have it for supper.

He was about to get out of bed and take a shower when the phone rang. Bummy picked it up and a suave, dangerous voice at the other end of the line said: "Poindexter, if I were you I'd leave Coco LeMayne alone. I'm sure you understand." There was a click and the line went dead.

Bummy held the phone stupidly in his hands, feeling the goose flesh start to rise. It would be his luck to have Poindexter mixed up in something like this. He could, he supposed, try to leave her alone, but he knew he wouldn't do that. Poindexter had written about brave, muscular heroes for so long he automatically assumed that he was one himself—and it would take a lot more than a phone call to intimidate him.

The buzzer sounded when he was halfway to the shower stall. He just made it back to bed when the door swung open and a rather trim young girl with harlequin glasses and a notebook sailed into the room. She took off her hat and coat and then perched on the side of his bed with a you-wouldn't-dare look—sort of an upper class if-you-touch-me-I'll-scream affair—opened her notebook and poised her pencil expectantly.

Bummy stared back, fascinated.

After five minutes her careful, professional smile slipped away and she frowned. "Well?" she asked.

"Well what?" Bummy said, nonplussed.

"Well really, Mr. Poindexter," she drawled. "Do you want to dictate more on your story or not?"

Bummy sneezed and stalled for time by searching for a handkerchief. What he knew about writing you could engrave on the head of a pin in capitals. He counseled himself with the thought that this was no time to be faint-hearted and did his best to assume an efficient and business-like air.

"Why certainly, sugar. I was just waiting for you to read back the last portion I've dictated so far." He heaved a sigh of relief. Poindexter to the rescue again.

The girl frowned. "My name's still Alice Martin, but I suppose that's something you'll never learn."

She opened her book and started to read. Bummy leaned back and closed his eyes, hoping that he looked like he was concentrating.

When she had finished Bummy was staring at her, entranced.

"Well, go on," he said. "What happened next?"

Miss Martin stared back, dumfounded. "You write 'em, Mr. Poindexter, I just copy 'em."

Bummy recovered and Poindexter came to the fore. "Hell of a place to stop, wasn't it?" he said wickedly.

"Twelve per cent sex sells a novel," Miss Martin said primly, "but sometimes I think you overdo it."

"Well...I don't think I'll write anything more on that today. You can change the orange blossoms to magnolia blossoms—don't know how I slipped up on that. And, oh yes what's on the schedule for business functions?"

She flipped open a different page of her notebook. "F. and J. Mc-Glauchlin have sent a check for royalties from 'Audrey Forever.' *Ladies Home* wants to serialize 'Sarah of the South' and MGM wants to buy the title."

"Just the title?"

Her eyebrows arched. "Well, heav-

ens, there's a limit to what they can put on the screen!"

"Anything else?"

"Yes. You have a cocktail party at the publisher's at two and an autographing party at four."

She started putting on her coat to leave. Bummy stopped her, an idea slowly taking form in his mind.

"Cancel those parties."

Miss Martin gaped.

"You heard me, cancel them," Bummy said sternly. "And you can scrap that—that—what I've dictated so far." Inside, Bummy could feel Poindexter's protest, but he ignored it. "And you can take off your hat and coat and have some coffee sent up. You're going to be here a long time."

The potion guaranteed success and there wasn't any better time than now to get at the writing of the Great American Novel. For the next few months he was going to be pretty busy—except, of course, when he was with Coco LeMayne.

BUMMY got out of the elevator and started down the hall to the publisher's office. From the sounds, the party had been in progress for quite a while.

He felt tired and nervous. It had been worth it, though, it had been worth every drop of sweat that had gone into it. He had delivered the manuscript to the publisher several days ago and the party was in its honor.

There was a small counter just inside the door and a couple of office boys were checking the coats. They had a bowl on the counter and Bummy could see a few coins in it.

He handed his coat to one of the boys. "How's it going? Raking in a lot of money from the high-brow crowd?"

One of the kids looked disgusted. "Yeah, sure, we're doing great. If we

keep this up, we'll make enough money for street-car fare. Three nickels, two tax tokens, and an autograph. We're hoping the guy drops dead pretty soon so his signature will be worth dough."

Bummy tipped them half a dollar and moved into the crowd.

An hour later, after he had sampled one of the cocktails and several of the small Ritz crackers with cheese on them (over Poindexter's inner protests), he ran into Johnathan McGlauchlin, his publisher. McGlauchlin was a paunchy, balding man with eyes that glittered like a fourth of July sparkler. He clapped Bummy on the back and pushed him into a corner, practically impaling him on the end of a cigar.

"Just thinking of what we ought to have for your next book, Poindexter," he wheezed. "Got to have a lot of bedroom scenes"—he dug Bummy in the ribs—"the public loves bedroom scenes. Figure our heroine will be the daughter of a wealthy southern plantation owner, but she is raised by kinfolk in the north. She grows up and acts as a spy for the northern army in the Civil War, gets caught, and is ready to be stood up against the wall and shot by a platoon captained by a southerner who's actually her father when she's rescued by a dashing southern lad who turns out to be her childhood sweetheart and with whom she tries to run away, which so enrages her father that he sends her back to the northern lines where she's taken for a spy and accidentally shot—but not fatally—so that when her sweetheart and father hear about it they can rush to her deathbed and have a reconciliation with Abraham Lincoln and Robert E. Lee trying to patch up the romance. You can have some more bedroom scenes"—he dug Bummy in the ribs again—"between the time she leaves

the North and comes back."

He took another chew on his cigar and slapped Bummy on the back. "That'll make a great story, Poindexter. I can see the blurb right now: "She dared *anything* for Love!"

Bummy caught his breath. "What—what did you think of the one I just sent in, 'An American Illiad'?" he asked modestly. "Of course, I know it's a little out of my line, but I thought it was the best I've done."

McGlauchlin winked. "Terrific, just terrific! You know, sometimes I wonder what kind of lives you authors lead that you can write that kind of stuff. Why, brother, it'll be the hottest under-the-counter item since the Kinsey report." Bummy caught it on the back again and McGlauchlin disappeared in a haze of cigar smoke and alcohol fumes.

BUMMY stood there, shocked. It seemed incredible that McGlauchlin could have misunderstood. He circulated around the room and eavesdropped on conversations. It was all too true. Whether it was because they misunderstood, took the wrong meaning, or maybe because Bummy had slipped up in writing it, he discovered that he had turned out the greatest shocker since Tobacco Road. It was the type of thing that would be banned from Boston to Little Rock and immediately bounce to the top of the best-seller lists.

He drifted apart from the crowd and stood by himself in a corner, watching the gaiety around him. He thought he understood why. He would be a success in each incarnation but he couldn't change the pattern. He couldn't move out of it. As an author like Poindexter, he'd be a success in writing the busy historical novels that were Poindexter's specialty, but he couldn't write anything serious. If he did, he wouldn't be successful.

Bummy felt tired. He'd had enough as an author. Poindexter could keep his talent and his ulcers and be welcome to them.

There was a stir in the crowd and Bummy spotted some newcomers heading his way. They didn't look like they worked for any publishing house and they didn't look like authors. Suddenly he was aware of danger.

It was simple, really. He, as Poindexter, had been seeing too much of Coco LeMayne. Now was the time when, as the saying went, he'd "get his". It didn't seem possible that it would happen in the middle of a publisher's cocktail party, but the resulting confusion would be perfect for a get-away. Bummy, familiar with the characters and the rub-out artists on the edge of the Loop, could spot the traditional bulge just inside the lapel of their suit-coats.

There was no time to lose. He turned around and fished in his pockets for the vial. He'd had enough of Poindexter. It was Poindexter who had insisted on seeing Coco LeMayne; it would be Poindexter who could attend to the offer of free air-conditioning.

He had the vial to his lips. He wanted to be a regular eight-to-five man, somebody who had an office and reported to it regularly. Somebody like Evans J. Browne....

BUMMY looked down at himself and winced. The suit he was wearing was clean but old, the serge on his knees had worn to the point where he could use it for screening in the summertime. His shoes were a battered brown and the laces weren't even strong enough to strangle a kitten. His shirt was frayed and there was a gravy stain on his tie.

He looked at his watch and automatically reached down for his right hand desk drawer. The bottle of cheap

scotch still gurgled when he shook it and he poured himself half a tumbler.

Outside his office window it was the kind of antiseptic morning that comes wrapped in cellophane with a little tag on it saying, "Untouched by human hands". A light covering of snow lay over the city like a band-aid over a dirty cut. By ten o'clock the bandage would be dirty around the edges and by evening the raw ugliness of the city would be staring at him through the window.

Bummy turned back to his desk and set the glass carefully over one of the previous rings it had left. He liked his desk—it was large enough to play ping-pong on and bare as a baby's behind. Except, of course, for the little stack of mail neatly piled in one corner.

There were a couple of ads for loaded dice and marked cards, the usual collection of bills, and a small note with a check from a client for whom he had once done a favor. The envelope was slightly perfumed and Bummy smelled it casually. She had been a very understanding client.

He had just started slitting open the envelopes containing the bills when the office buzzer sounded.

"If you've got a key, use it," he said. "If you haven't, just turn the knob and walk right in."

The knob turned slowly and the door opened.

She was a knock-out, Bummy thought. She was terrific, she had curves like the drive in Jackson Park, she was good enough for Minsky's. She was the type of girl that every red-blooded American boy should have a picture of to carry next to his heart.

And she was frightened.

"My name's Coco LeMayne," she said.

Bummy continued slitting the en-

velopes, looking at her through half-lowered lids.

"I'm a singer," she added.

She stood there for a minute and when Bummy didn't say anything, started to flush and turn away. Bummy let her get halfway out of the door before he opened his mouth.

"It's your nickel, Miss LeMayne. Keep talking. You didn't come to see me just to tell me your name and occupation."

She came back and shut the door silently behind her. Her cheeks were slightly red. "It's—it's rather personal," she said.

BUMMY opened a desk drawer and threw a card at her. It said: *Evans J. Browne, Private Investigations*, in small neat script.

He said: "The police station's just two blocks down, if you want them. And I meant what I said on the card."

She blushed and averted her eyes. "It's because I love him," she said in a small voice.

"Don't go into the act," Bummy interrupted. "The guy who said everybody loves a lover didn't know what he was talking about. Let's start from the beginning—and don't leave anything out. I don't shock easy. I learned all about the birds and the bees by reading the signs scrawled on fences when I was ten years old."

The story was as long as the first draft of *Gone With the Wind* and as dirty as the inside of a restaurant garbage can during the rush hour. In a condensed version, she was in love with Clay Poindexter—as Bummy well knew—but another admirer of hers was slightly jealous. Consequently, Poindexter was down on somebody's list for the big farewell ceremony with the double bouquet of lilies that he'd never be able to smell.

Miss LeMayne didn't mention the name that Bummy was waiting for.

When she had finished he said: "I'm afraid that I can't take your case."

Her eyes went wide. "Why not?"

Bummy spread his hands expansively. "If I'm going to take your case, I'll have to know more than that. If you expect me to trust you, you're going to have to trust me. Otherwise it's no dice, you'll have to take your linen elsewhere. I don't wash it like a launderall, whenever somebody puts in a quarter."

Her lower lip fell as hard as a housewife's first cake when somebody jumps on the floor.

"What do you want to know?"

"Not much. Only what you won't tell me. Who's the third party? The other man?"

She paled. "I—I can't tell you that. But I don't want much either. All I want you to do is protect Poindexter."

"That's all, huh?" Bummy grunted. "Just something to occupy my spare time with, kid's play."

He picked up the tumbler of scotch and drained it.

Miss LeMayne got up and started for the door, her face as bitter as a California orange grower's after a heavy frost.

"My rates are thirty dollars a day and expenses," Bummy said.

She whirled. "I thought you weren't going to take it?"

He smiled crookedly. "It's because your story touched my heart."

When she had gone, Bummy capped the scotch and put it back in the drawer. This was going to be an interesting caper. A girl who said she was a singer and never batted an eyelash at paying thirty dollars a day and expense. He wondered just who she sang for.

He put on his hat and started down the stairs to the street. Bummy **was** worried. He didn't think he was

going to like being a private eye. He had known Coco LeMayne the minute she stepped into the office, but he hadn't been able to do anything about it. He couldn't change the pattern. And besides that, his thinking was fuzzy. He "thought" in similes and it **was** hard to get a clear mental picture of things.

Outside, a storm was blowing up in the west, and Bummy knew the day was going to be as bleak and dismal as the inside of a pin-hole camera when the—

Oh hell, it was just going to be a lousy day.

AT NOON he knew as much about Clay Poindexter as Poindexter did himself. Bummy had cased the publishers, looked him up in the Better Business Bureau, and did some quick research in *Who's Who*.

At one it was time for lunch and Bummy's mouth fairly watered. As Clay Poindexter, he had lived on milk and crackers for weeks. He strolled along the main drag eyeing the various eateries hungrily and at last he turned into a bar. Bummy looked for a lunch counter, didn't see one, and reluctantly sat on one of the red leatherette stools at the brass rail.

Evans J. Browne, like all good private eyes, didn't eat—he subsisted on liquids.

Half an hour later Bummy crawled into a phone booth and dialed Poindexter's number. A sleepy voice answered the phone and Bummy disguised his.

"I'm calling for a friend, Mr. Poindexter," he said brightly. "A college chum of yours who's in town. He wondered what you were doing tonight and thought maybe you could get together."

Poindexter's voice came sleepily back to the effect that he hadn't been feeling himself lately—which Bummy

quite understood—and hadn't planned on going any place that night, unless he stopped in at the Flamingo Heaven where Coco LeMayne was singing. And come to think of it, just what was the name of this friend?

"One of your Alpha Gam fraternity brothers," Bummy started.

Poindexter's voice was larded with suspicion. He had never been an Alpha Gam at college but had been made an honorary brother several years later on contributing some money to their new house.

Well, it was all a mistake, Bummy said, this couldn't be the Clay Poindexter after all. He probably had the wrong college. And he hung up.

The telephone directory gave out with the information that the Flamingo Heaven was just outside Chicago, on Highway 66. The cab fare would be expensive, but then it would be Coco LeMayne who would be paying for it, not him.

THE FLAMINGO Heaven was a bright spot of light in a patch of rather dull county-side. There was a gravel drive that led up to the front of it where a uniformed doorman greeted you and passed you on to the inside. The doorman looked like he used to play tackle for the Chicago Bears and his coat bulged even more than was permissible for ex-football players, but polite guests weren't supposed to notice that.

Bummy tipped the driver and sent him on. He could probably pick one up later on that night.

The doorman looked at him sourly.

"Maybe you should have kept the cab, buster. It would be a lot easier to ride back to Chicago than walk."

Bummy, as Bummy, started to feel his knees quake. Bummy, as Evans J. Browne, calmly lit a cigarette and watched the smoke spiral up into the pitch black sky. The doorman began

to look uneasy. Other guests would soon be arriving and he had to ditch this guy quick.

"I thought the Flamingo was open to anyone who liked a drink and," Bummy coughed discreetly, "a little sport."

The doorman sneered. "This is too rich for your blood, Mister. When you stand in a strong light you can see your knees right through that serge."

"How sad," Bummy murmured, taking out his wallet. "I left my other suit at home." He opened the wallet and let the doorman get a quick look at a bunch of green bills, and then slipped it back in his trousers. "Miss LeMayne was expecting me, too."

The doorman's face was frozen. He stood aside and motioned Bummy in, his fingers twitching. "Anybody can make a mistake," he muttered.

Bummy shrugged and walked on in. It had been worth the time to get all his money changed to singles. They probably wouldn't buy more than two chips at the Flamingo's roulette wheels, but they made an impressive bunch in his wallet.

On the inside, the Flamingo looked a lot smaller than it had from the driveway. It was cut up into smaller rooms, Bummy knew, where you could try your luck at roulette or poker or blackjack or practically any game you could think of. In the lobby a couple of rich punk kids were bending the arms of some slot machines, but Bummy stalked casually by. The main dining room would be where Poindexter was.

He found himself a table and glanced around, finally locating Clayborne a short three tables away. His eyes were tightly riveted on the stage, where Coco LeMayne was singing, dressed in a long black sheath of nylon that was so tight you could almost make out her appendicitis scar.

He sat back to enjoy himself. What

would happen, he didn't know. What he would find out, he didn't know. But if the books he had read on it were any judge, all he had to do was sit tight and watch things happen.

The books were absolutely right. Things were going to happen. They were going to happen to him.

A waiter came up and lightly tapped him on the shoulder. "Mr. Inchcliffe's expecting you, sir."

Bummy stirred. "Mr. Inchcliffe and I don't know each other."

"But Mr. Inchcliffe would like to," the waiter insisted. Bummy got up and followed him. Something told him that it was the wise thing to do. The "something" was the glint of shiny gun metal that showed when the waiter had bent over to give him the message.

Shoulder holsters were all the rage that season.

JEFFREY INCHCLIFFE looked as brown as a bride's first batch of burned biscuits and was probably just as tough. His tan came from watching the ponies run in Florida during the winter season. His toughness came from a background in the slums where he had earned his living the hard way.

He looked at Bummy without smiling and motioned him to a seat. They were the only two in the room.

"What's your interest in Poindexter?"

Inchcliffe wasn't wasting any time.

Bummy wasn't adverse to telling everything he knew, but that wasn't the way private eyes worked.

"I'm not interested in your business, Mr. Inchcliffe," he murmured. "I'm not sure that you should be interested in mine."

Inchcliffe hunched forward, his eyes a poisonous blue. "Poindexter is a friend of mine. I wouldn't like to see anything happen to him."

Bummy shrugged. "I was hired to protect him."

"From who?"

"My client didn't say."

"You wouldn't be playing cagey, would you?"

"No, just smart."

"I don't think so."

"You wouldn't. You're not in my business."

"Who's your client?"

"Who are your customers?" Bummy was frantic. There wasn't any point in keeping Coco LeMayne's name a secret but again, he couldn't break the pattern and tell.

Inchcliffe pressed a button on his desk. A twin brother of the doorman came in. He had a pair of tux pants on but he was bare down to the waist. All ready for business, Bummy thought.

He had read enough books to know what was coming next. Inchcliffe gestured and the gorilla walked over. The next thing Bummy knew a hand like a hod full of bricks crashed across his face and he found himself playing tag with the rug on the floor. The hand reached down, lifted him up, and tried again. The lights in the room twinkled brightly and then went out, like they had gotten tired of burning just for Bummy's sake.

HE WOKE up the next morning in his office where somebody had thoughtfully deposited him. There was blood smeared across his face and on his suit. On the blotter on his desk were three teeth and a bottle of glue.

Inchcliffe had a sense of humor.

Bummy got up and staggered down the hall to the mop closet, where there was a wash bowl and water. He sloshed away the dried blood and ran his fingers through his hair. It wasn't a big improvement but it helped.

Back in his office he had company.

It flashed a badge and introduced itself as Inspector Moritz, from headquarters.

Moritz sat on his desk and lit a cigarette. "Looks like you had a bad night," he said.

"The boys I know play a tough game of tiddly-winks," Bummy said nastily. "What's your business?"

"Clay Poindexter was found in a culvert just outside the city this morning. Apparently the breaking of dawn was too much for him because he didn't live through it. They found a gun near the body. It was registered in your name and had your prints on it. We thought you might know something about it."

Bummy should've expected it. Private eyes were always suspected of murders at one time or another.

"I didn't do it," he said earnestly. "I was hired to protect Poindexter from somebody."

"Who's your client?" Moritz asked.

"I can't say," Bummy said. "You know I can't. But give me twenty-four hours and I'll have Poindexter's murderer for you. I swear it."

Moritz snarled. "You private eyes are all alike. Every one of you thinks that you're another Sherlock Holmes and the department is just a bunch of fumble-fingered idiots. But get this, Browne," he lowered his voice dangerously, "if you don't produce inside of twenty-four hours, you know what'll happen." He gestured to the wall. "We'll pick up your license!"

"Among other things," Bummy murmured.

The afternoon sped by quickly. Bummy began to feel grave doubts about remaining as Evans J. Browne, the private eye. He knew he'd win out in the end, knew that he'd produce the killer within twenty-four hours. But the prospect, somehow, didn't thrill him. His face felt raw and sore and he missed his three

front teeth. He just wasn't the adventuresome type.

Evening came and Bummy went down the stairs to go to the bar. Just outside the door somebody stepped behind him and he felt the cold jab of metal in his ribs.

"Into the alley," a voice grated.

They went towards the alley, Bummy's heart pumping frantically. He was getting beat up so much he felt like a dish of fudge. There was another hood waiting in the alley for him and as soon as he got there he got a hard kick to the kidneys and he doubled up on the bricks. He knew what he was going to do and what he had to do. Somehow he managed to get hold of the vial, shield it and uncork it, and put it to his mouth.

The job of a private eye wasn't for him. He'd be a success at it, sure, but success would probably cripple him for life. It was fast women, fast money, and hard knocks. He wanted to be just an average joe; somebody with an insurance policy to his name. Maybe even something in politics. Something like Joey DeJack.

JOEY DeJACK, Alderman of the first ward, flipped his cigar into the brass cuspidor and leaned back in his swivel chair. He tapped a pencil lightly against his teeth and gazed proudly around his office.

There was the engraved silver cuspidor—not actually used, of course—a gift from the precinct captains in his ward, and a large autographed photograph of the Chief, given to him after the last national elections when Joey had been one of the few to junk the Gallup poll and take a chance on a longshot. And then there were the usual campaign posters: The set for the industrial district urging less hours at more pay and the set for the Gold Coast demanding a decrease in government taxation and a more

stringent labor law.

Bummy got to his feet and hunted up a mirror. It wasn't too bad. His face was friendly and confiding, his hair a little sparse on top, and his suit was at least fairly new, if a trifle loud. Not bad at all.

He went back to his chair, propped his feet up on the desk and shouted into the next room: "Hey, Flaherty, what's on the docket for today?" Bummy, as alderman Joey DeJack, saw that he was in much the same fix as before. He'd have to play along in character.

Flaherty—a thin faced, shifty-eyed character—strolled into the room with a piece of dirty paper in his hands.

"Okay, boss! Got everything down here that ya gotta do today. Foist, at nine o'clock you gotta cut the ribbon opening the new bridge over the drainage canal. At ten ya give Miss Lizzie Borden a plaque for thirty years of service at PS 6, and at 11 you gotta meeting of precinct captains. In the afternoon all we have to do is collect our share of the voluntary campaign contributions from the local bars and attend a baby judging contest at the Third Avenue playground."

"Baby contest? What do I have to do there?"

"Ah, boss, you know—kiss 'em. That's what's usually done."

Bummy registered a silent protest and sighed. "Well, if we must, we must. Bring along the Listerine and we'll be on our way."

Bummy made the speech opening up the new drainage canal and tried to break the pattern and say something idealistic about it being the dawn of a new era and the sign of cleaner and more efficient government. He managed to pay lip service to the dawn-of-new-era idea but the rest of the speech was a rip-roaring tirade against the Other Party, his opponent in the coming elections, and why only

Joey DeJack was suited for the job of leading the first ward to bigger and better things for the next two years.

At PS 6 he gave Miss Borden the plaque, kissed her worn and wrinkled face, and then launched into a repeat of his first tirade. After all, someday those kids were going to be voters and they ought to know just where Joey DeJack stood. Bummy had to admit to himself that in this new incarnation he'd probably still be running when the kids were old enough to vote.

THE MEETING with precinct captains wasn't any better though it seemed even more successful than his first two speeches that day. Every time he mentioned the Administration in Power, the Party, and especially Joey DeJack, they broke up the proceedings by stamping and whistling and generally cheering their lungs out. Bummy almost cringed when they started yelling: "DeJack for mayor!" Almost. Instead, he found himself bowing and smiling and holding up a genial hand for silence and then telling them that he didn't seek the office, but if the people called he would be willing to contribute his time and energy to the Public Good.

This naturally brought down the house and it was a good half hour before he could find time for lunch.

At the playground Bummy found himself quite a hit with the small fry—Flaherty had thoughtfully provided ice cream cones for all who showed up—and an even greater hit with the mothers. By the time evening came, his lips were bruised and his smile was strictly an automatic reflex.

Back in his office, Bummy collapsed in his swivel chair and sighed. "At least the evening will be free," he almost sobbed.

Flaherty looked shocked. "Free? You haven't forgotten, have you,

boss? Tonight's the big fish fry out at Norton's grove for the Young Voter's club. After that you see Mrs. Mabel Morritsky—she's head of the League of Women Voters for Joey DeJack. All you gotta do is talk politics with her, make a few eyes at her, and she'll be eating outta your hand."

"Anything else?" Bummy asked sarcastically.

Flaherty scratched his head. "At midnight you're supposed to go out to the Flamingo Club and pick up Coco LeMayne, but you'd hardly class that as work."

Bummy sat frozen. Coco LeMayne.

He didn't have any doubt as to what the connection was. The third side of the triangle was now complete. And within twenty-four hours, Evans J. Browne would be bringing somebody in for murder. Somebody...

He made up his mind.

"How much money do we have in that voluntary contributions fund, Flaherty?"

Flaherty was puzzled. "Oh, around twenty-five thousand. Why?"

"Send it to the local hospital fund." He was surprised he could say it. Maybe it was possible, after all, to break the pattern.

Flaherty looked worried. "You feel okay, boss? You know we can't afford to throw the money away like that. The people love ya like ya are."

"You heard me," Bummy said. "How much do we have in the operating fund for the first ward?"

"About five or six thousand," Flaherty croaked

"Send it to the Heart Society or the Polio Fund or something. Clean out every dime in the office. And move—don't do it tomorrow, do it now!"

Flaherty left and Bummy mentally congratulated himself. It hadn't been difficult to do at all; all he had to do was assert himself.

HE GOT BACK to his office at midnight to pick up the car and head for the Flamingo Club. He wriggled the key in the lock on the garage door and walked in. A pair of hands clapped around his mouth and another pair grabbed his arms. He was gagged and tied and a moment later found himself in the back seat of his own car, barreling happily down the highway with strangers at the wheel.

There were bags of something on the back seat and Bummy at last raised himself to a sitting position to see what they were.

Cement. He was going to get a typically Chicago farewell party. A nice pair of cement brogans and a short swim in some lake or river.

A hand loosened the gag and Bummy felt himself able to talk. One of the strangers beat him to it.

"You're just a little too wise for your own good, Joey. We always knew you were a smart politician, but we didn't think you were that smart." He sneered. "That was really bright, donating all that dough to charity. And all in your own name, too. You woulda been snowed under in the next election if you hadn't done that."

He hadn't broken the pattern then. He had just done what was politically expedient to win an election.

He opened his mouth and said: "Then Coco LeMayne—"

The stranger nodded. "We know all about that, Joey. And that's another thing. You should've checked up on who Poindexter's friends were."

Bummy knew, but it didn't make a heck of a lot of difference.

He had had enough of being a politician. He could get out of it, he supposed. As a successful politician—

A chilling thought hit him. How many successful politicians had he known who had taken the short cut to headlines? And the more successful

they were, the more prone they seemed to this kind of ending. Prone. Hah. joke.

A light sweat broke out on his forehead. There was only one chance, when one of the hired thugs wasn't looking.

He bent double and hobbled a little. The vial dropped out to the floor of the car. Bummy stared at it. There was no way to uncork it, to get at the liquid. The contents glittered and sparkled and seemed to mock him. He brought his chin down on the vial, hard. The glass shattered and Bummy could feel the blood run from the cut on his chin. But that was minor—it was actually DeJack's chin. The few drops of liquid stood raised on the fiber floor mat, like drops of water on a table cloth that stand up for just a moment before soaking in. He bent down and licked them up.

He had enjoyed success in three different ways but like the old lady in the junk shop had said, not everybody likes it. And the price was pretty steep.

What he wouldn't give to be back...

BUMMY STOOD on the Canal street bridge, the flakes of snow falling slowly around him. He snuggled in his tattered overcoat and looked gratefully out at the world. He was just plain Bummy again. Not rich, not a power, and certainly not famous. He'd live from hand to mouth and starve one day and get by the next and spend the spring nights sleeping on the straw mattresses at the mission and if it got too cold he could

always manage to get sent to the House of Correction for a free thirty days of food and lodging.

A gust of wind came along and the poster on the side of the Civic Opera House ripped and tore and skittered down on the sidewalk. Bummy ran after it and got a good look. It was an ad for the Flamingo Heaven and showed a rather plump version of Coco LeMayne sweating over a hot microphone.

Bummy picked it up, balled it between his hands, and threw it in the river. He walked over to the Northwestern Station. A crowd of late night theatre goers were just running for the last suburban train home.

"Gotta dime for a cuppa cawfee?" Bummy mumbled in his best hopeless tone of voice.

The McGee looked at him startled, and then pulled a bill out of his wallet. He pressed it into Bummy's hand and hurried after his companion. Bummy caught a drift of the conversation. "...saw such a pitiful sight in all my life. It really moved me!"

Bummy clutched the bill and suddenly knew he'd be able to do a little better than the hash at Callahan's and straw mats in the flop houses.

The last dose of the potion had still worked according to what the old lady had said.

He was a bum, like he had always been, but this time there was a difference.

He was going to be a *successful* bum.

THE END

Like most people, you probably want to be rich and famous. It's easy—If you're willing to pay the price! How much? Read:

THE TERRIBLE PUPPETS

by PAUL FAIRMAN

IN THE SEPTEMBER FANTASTIC ADVENTURES—ON SALE JULY 20



She was the universe's most beautiful woman; yet hatred ran green in her veins!

The GREEN BLOOD of TREACHERY

by Willard Hawkins

**Even if Cleo's corny lisp and baby stare
failed to fool the Venusians, Earth knew
how to use another weapon: mashed spuds!**

THE SUPREME Commissioner of Defense glanced up from the memorandum on his desk at the young man who stood before him in the ornate uniform of a captain of the Headquarters Guard.

"You're discontented here," the Supreme Commissioner remarked. "The records show that you have requested a transfer to some other post."

"Yes, sir."

"Your reasons?"

"I've already stated them. I'd prefer to go where there's more prospect of action. All I do here is drill and inspect troops—march in parades."

The Commissioner again studied his memorandum. "Captain Drake, what I tell you now must be regarded as top secret. This department is planning to send a special operative on a dangerous mission to Venus."

The officer's eyes lighted. "You mean I'll be given the chance to—"

"No. The operative is to be a girl."

"... Yes, sir."

John Angstrom, the Supreme Commissioner, waited a moment before adding, "As a matter of fact, the girl has been selected. You may know her—my niece—Cleo Spahr."

"Miss Spahr!" Harlan Drake's startled response seemed to be wrenched from him by force. "But, sir, that's monstrous!"

The Commissioner eyed him coldly. "I didn't ask for your opinion."

"I know, sir—it's presumptuous of me." Then, impulsively, Drake plunged on: "But any Earth girl—let alone your own flesh and blood. Knowing how these Venusians treat their captives. Why, sir—"

"Captain Drake!"

The young man closed his lips tightly. Angstrom leaned back, adjusting his big body comfortably to the contour chair.

"Perhaps," he suggested ironically, "you're hoping by this display of in-

subordination to be relieved of your duties—shifted to some distant outpost, such as the Lunar fortifications.”

“I’d welcome that, sir,” Harlan responded. But his superior’s tone rankled. It seemed unfair to class his involuntary protest as insubordination. He could not resist adding, “Look, sir, why do you have to send Cleo? Why not some trained operative who’ll stand a better chance of succeeding with the mission?”

ANGSTROM ALMOST allowed his impassive features to smile. “Then it is not just ‘any Earth girl’ that arouses your concern. It’s my special choice of Cleo.”

Harlan flushed.

“So that’s the way of it! May I ask whether my niece is aware of this...ah...solicitude?”

“I doubt whether she’s even aware of my existence,” returned the young man frankly.

“Another question. Knowing—as apparently you do—how the Venusians treat those they consider spies and enemies, what would you do if Cleo faced such a fate?”

“Do you want a straight answer, sir?”

“I asked a straight question.”

“Very well, sir. I’d blast her without an instant’s hesitation.”

From beneath lowered eyelids, Angstrom studied the tense features of the young man. “You may go.”

Saluting, Drake executed an about-face. Then he paused. “May I inquire if you definitely intend—?”

“Captain Drake!” The Commissioner’s voice was peremptory.

With head erect, the officer strode from the room.

He would not have been surprised to find a pair of WFSP men waiting in the guard office to take him into custody. Angstrom, he knew, could have summoned anywhere from one

operative to a squad of the World Federation Secret Police by a touch of a button. But the respite probably was temporary. The interview—in which he had acted a part which his superior appeared to regard as insubordination—surely would be followed by some disciplinary action.

He was moodily contemplating this prospect when his call signal buzzed. He clicked on the visiscreen to find himself face to face with the girl of his dreams.

For a moment, he could only stare. His tongue formed the word “Cleo,” but no sound came from his lips.

THE GIRL smiled engagingly. “You’re Captain Harlan Drake, aren’t you? I think we were introduced at some reception. Do you remember?”

Remember! It had been the high point of his existence thus far.

“I wonder,” she continued sweetly, “if you would drop over to see me in about an hour?”

“I’d—” gulp— “I’d be glad to.” Then, almost before the words escaped, came the doubt. “Your uncle put you up to this, didn’t he?”

She hesitated. “Well...I’ve just been talking to him. But I had often thought of trying to become better acquainted. You’ll come?”

“Yes,” he said gruffly. “I’ll come.”

His jaw tensed as the visiscreen blanked out. Whatever their reason for taking him into the plan, he wouldn’t alter his attitude. A dangerous mission to Venus, Angstrom had said. He opposed the idea with every fiber of his being.

An hour later, he was on his way to the Commissioner’s residence by private tube. He had made the trip before, in connection with his duties. But this time, the door which opened invitingly at his arrival was not the one leading to Angstrom’s den, but an

entrance which he realized with a thrill must lead to Cleo's apartment.

He was whisked aloft to find himself in a reception room of harmoniously blended colors and softly diffused lights. Selecting the least comfortable-looking chair, he waited tensely—his emotions divided between anticipation and defiance.

A drapery parted to admit a lithe, girlish figure. He sprang erect, but to his disappointment the girl was not Cleo. And the depth of his adoration for Angstrom's niece may be judged from the fact that he experienced only disappointment at the lovely vision which floated toward him.

He knew at once who she must be—La-ura Lu, the Venusian princess who had been visiting Earth for the past two months, most of which time she had spent as guest of Cleo and her uncle. Venusian women were like and yet unlike their Terrestrial neighbors. The most striking difference, of course, was their skin color, which ranged from the deep green of equatorial regions to the soft absinthe tint of the northern races, to which La-ura Lu belonged. Their features were delicate, and their pointed ears and slant eyes gave them an exotic appeal which most Earthmen found irresistible. They had many bizarre ways of arranging their hair which, as in the case of La-ura Lu, usually possessed a lighter sheen than their skin. There were other piquant differences, most noticeable of which was the characteristic cat-eye. In accordance with their moods, the pupil dilated from a narrow slit to a breath-takingly large ellipse—large, that is, by Terrestrial standards.

VENUSIAN GIRLS, so it was whispered in the locker rooms, wore very few clothes in their native habitat, and when they submitted to Terrestrial conventions, they managed

to do so in a manner more provocative than concealing. From a Venusian point of view, La-ura Lu was no doubt vastly overdressed; but after his first glance at her slender, yet voluptuous, figure, Harlan turned his eyes away, flushing with embarrassment.

She paused, as if expecting him to speak. When he said nothing, she glided toward him. "You waiting for Mithy Thpar?" Her voice had a singing lilt, with the lisp which betrayed the usual Venusian inability to cope with sibilants.

"She's expecting me," Harlan replied stiffly.

"Mithy come thoon," she assured him, fluttering closer. Her slender fingers reached out and caressed his hair.

He pushed the hand away. Venusian girls were notoriously affectionate. You had to be on your guard.

The girl's cat-like eyes narrowed with a hurt expression. "No like?" she asked softly. "No think La-ura Lu pretty?"

"Sure, you're pretty," he returned. "You're—" he stole a glance—"you're exquisite. But look here, Princess—" he fended her off as she wriggled closer—"we Earth people don't think it's nice to start necking with strangers. We—"

Her porcelain-green body slumped dejectedly. The pupils contracted to narrow slits. She pouted, "La-ura Lu like big Earthman. Why no like La-ura Lu?"

"Listen," he told her with exasperation, "I like you well enough, but you go tell Miss Spahr I'm here. Tell her if she can't see me now I'll come back later. Do that, won't you, Princess?"

For answer, she dropped on a couch and began laughing hysterically. Harlan observed her in offended silence.

"You're so funny!" she gurgled.

He straightened up, startled. "You

mean 'tho funny!' he corrected involuntarily. Then, "What is this?"

THROUGH THE draperies came John Angstrom's impressive bulk. He, too, was laughing. "Boy, did she have you on the run!" he roared. "Give you one guess who she is."

"Not..." Harlan looked doubtfully at the Venusian princess, who was wiping tears of mirth from her eyes with a dainty bit of cambric.

"I'm Cleo Spahr," she assured him. "Tell me honestly, Captain Drake, did I act the part of a Venusian hussy?"

"You fooled me," Harlan acknowledged. "But I've never been close to—one of them before."

"She'd fool a native," declared John Angstrom. "We tried her out on the Venusian vice-consul the other night and she went over big. The thing that counts, of course—she was brought up on Venus—lived there until her parents died. Speaks their lingo and knows their ways."

"You can see now," explained Cleo, "why we invited the Princess to stay here. So that I might study her mannerisms and cute little ways. It's a lot of fun. Especially with bashful men." She glanced up mischievously, then succumbed to another gale of laughter.

"All right," Harlan acknowledged. "I fell for it. You say the vice-consul fell for it. But somewhere you'll make a mistake. Suppose that green pigment begins to wear off."

"It won't," assured Angstrom. "Not if she keeps the edges touched up. Because it isn't pigment. It's a flexible glove that fits over her whole body. Look." He took the girl's wrist and held out a shapely arm for the officer's appraisal. "It has pores, just like skin of regular Venusian texture. Even the Princess's finger prints have been duplicated. Cleo can bathe in it

—even acquire a sunburn. Some trick of the chemicals employed in tinting it. You know how Venusians turn a darker shade of green if they're exposed to the sun's rays."

"Which I hope won't be necessary," interposed Cleo. "I'm sure it would be unbecoming."

"The part around the edges is applied in liquid form—her eyes, mouth, nostrils, and of course her scalp," Angstrom rambled on enthusiastically. "Look close. You can't detect where the blending takes place. The planes of their faces are different, but the mask takes care of that. Thunderation—it ought to be good! Oscar Hauptman created it."

HAUPTMAN, Harlan knew, was the expert who, with his highly skilled staff, fashioned disguises for Intelligence Service operatives.

"Sure, there are things she'll have to be careful about," Angstrom added. "She mustn't let herself be cut, or even scratched, because her blood would flow red instead of green. And her diet. Some of those Venusian foods don't agree too well with Earth people. And if they caught her eating potatoes, they'd think she was crazy, because they're allergic to practically all root vegetables."

"The cat-eyes," Harlan inquired. "How did you manage them?"

"Contact lenses. Hauptman devised an iris that contracts and expands in response to the blood flow. Cleo can control them pretty much at will. Show him, pet."

Obligingly, she demonstrated by causing her eye slits to narrow and expand alternately. Harlan gazed fascinatedly into their depths.

"So you see, Captain Drake," she smiled persuasively, "this undertaking isn't so hopeless. I think I can get away with the impersonation and do the job Uncle has in mind."

A question which had persistently bothered Harlan burst from his lips: "Why go to all this trouble for me?" he demanded. "I'm a mere captain in the Headquarters Guard—a nobody. Even if you could convince me that impersonating the Princess is as easy as hurdle-jumping on the moon, what difference would it make?"

"Tell him," responded Angstrom. "He'll have to know."

She lowered her voice. "It's this way: We have good reason to suspect that Princess La-ura Lu, for all her innocent ways, is here for something more important than a mere good-will visit. She's—well—her status is about the same as an Intelligence operative, and she's said to be exceptionally clever at her job. Her mission is to learn all she can about our fortifications on the Moon."

"Why not just prevent her from getting the dope?"

"Because," responded Angstrom dryly, "we have a better plan. You're aware, no doubt, that the World Federation is negotiating a ninety-nine year treaty with Venus, covering trade relations, exchange of scientific data, spaceway controls, colonization of habitable planets and asteroids, and exploitation of their resources."

"I thought it was settled."

"Far from it. They're stalling—and we know the reason why. They'll concede a number of disputed points, once they are convinced of Earth's invulnerability. The Lunar outpost is the key to our defense position. Fifty years and several billions of dollars hence, it will be impregnable. Right now, unfortunately, it isn't. For them to know this would be disastrous. So, what's to prevent us from sending a report, through their own secret agent, which makes that outpost of fifty years hence a present reality?"

"You mean that Cleo will deliver this report?"

"Exactly."

Harlan gasped. The risk was even greater than he had realized—incredibly greater.

"**YOU EXPECT** Cleo to impersonate the Princess on her own planet? Deliver a faked report to the girl's superiors—people who have worked with her—know her intimately?"

"I believe she's clever enough to get away with it," Angstrom responded tersely. "Don't forget that our Intelligence Service has some pretty keen operatives. They not only ferreted out the dope on La-ura Lu, but got their hands on her secret instructions, passwords, codes, and the like."

"But what possible opportunity could this Princess have to learn the truth about our Lunar fortifications?"

"None, as yet. But her return passage is booked on the Venusian space liner Uno-canabe. Its departure is timed so that it will pass close by the moon. Here's the plan: The liner will find an excuse to put in there for emergency repairs. It will delay long enough for La-ura Lu to do her stuff. In the normal course of events, we wouldn't expect a sheltered Venusian girl—a princess—to be a trained observer."

"Certainly the post authorities would exercise some discretion."

"I'm not so sure of that. An attractive girl wouldn't have much trouble seducing some of those woman-starved officers into showing her the works. And La-ura Lu has plenty of what it takes."

His misgivings by no means stilled, Harlan shifted the subject. "How do you intend to dispose of the real Princess?"

"She'll be considerably treated—but of course she's going to be out of circulation for a long, long time. That's what you have to face if you're

doing her sort of a job."

Harlan flinched. Cleo, doing the same sort of a job, could anticipate no such easy fate if detected by the Venusians. The thought caused him to respond grimly, "I still think it's monstrous to send her on this mission."

Angstrom shrugged. "Sorry that's your attitude. Evidently we'll have to pick another bodyguard."

"Bodyguard!"

"The Terrestrial Government naturally will insist upon insuring the Princess's safe return by assigning one of its trusted military aides to guard her during the return voyage. The greenies, of course, will see through this polite gesture—or think they do. They'll consider it a subterfuge to get an Intelligence agent aboard for spying purposes. But they'll consent, knowing that La-ura Lu can take care of any Earthman in her own way, and they'll deftly stuff him with misinformation. Actually, the man's job will be no more than it purports to be—to protect the supposed Princess."

"But you mentioned me—"

"Don't interrupt. The man selected must be loyal. Your screening in that respect was satisfactory. He must be devoted to the point where the operative's safety takes precedence over his own. Certain remarks you made in my office seem to click on that point. And the reply you gave when I asked what you'd do if she faced Venusian torture—frankly, that bears most of all on the situation."

"You mean—if she goes, I'll be the one to see her through?" Harlan Drake could not keep the eagerness out of his voice.

"Would have been," corrected Angstrom. "Having declared yourself so unequivocally against the whole project..." He left the inference dangling.

Harlan rose to his feet. He did not

so much as glance at the girl, in her alluring Venusian disguise, who sat alertly watching.

"If she's determined to take the risk," he said slowly, "and if I am to go along as her escort, I'll cooperate as fully as I can."

"Fair enough!" Angstrom clapped him on the shoulder. "Knew you were the man, the minute you showed spunk enough to declare yourself in my office. Report to Intelligence tomorrow morning for preliminary briefing. Now, the two of you talk things over."

He took his departure through the draperies.

EMBARKATION on a space liner is an event, even for seasoned travelers. Surrounding the huge elliptical bulk of the vessel are a chaos of loading cranes, the paraphernalia of fueling, the activities of testing and making last-minute adjustments, tearing down scaffolds, and clearing the field. Officials, inspectors, and workmen swarm over the scene. In the passenger ramps, there is the inevitable congestion, the lineups at the customs gates, the waving and shouting of farewells to the passengers from those who have congregated on the many-tiered balconies to see them off.

Impressive in his dress uniform, Harlan Drake enjoyed to the full these preliminaries to his first space voyage beyond the familiar hop to the moon. In abeyance for the moment were his misgivings for Cleo Spahr, who must be somewhere in the embarkation crowd, fully launched upon her impersonation of the Venusian princess.

Within the cell-like confines of the inspection chamber, he patiently endured the cursory search made by the green-skinned guard for weapons or contraband. The greenie's fingers were deft but, as Harlan knew, they mere-

ly camouflaged the real search, which was being conducted by instruments veritably lining the enclosure—instruments which recorded the material of every item of clothing, every article contained in pockets or elsewhere, even his anatomical and bone structure, down to the fillings in his teeth.

"You okay. Go 'long in," the guard informed him with a grin. Harlan proceeded up the ramp to the observation deck of the liner with its encirclement of porthole-like windows.

The Intelligence officers who briefed them had assured Cleo that she wouldn't have to pass through an inspection gate. She and perhaps half a dozen other exalted passengers whose rank placed them in a class apart would enter the vessel from a ramp connecting directly with their deck level. Devoutly, Harlan hoped the Intelligence officers knew what they were talking about. Cleo might pass for a Venusian to outward appearance, but the probing of sensitive instruments would surely disclose discrepancies. She was safe only so long as she aroused no slightest suspicion.

At least ninety percent of the passengers were greenies, Harlan estimated. The operating staff was almost exclusively Venusian. He noted only one exception—a big blond-haired young operator in the radio turret—no doubt an exchange technician assigned to that position under an arrangement between the two planetary governments. The new treaty, of which Cleo and her uncle had spoken, would greatly increase the number of such exchanges.

Working his way through the crowd toward the upper decks, Captain Drake kept his eyes alert for a glimpse of Cleo—or of La-ura Lu, as he must now think of her. He was unsuccessful. When the public address system announced, first in the Venusian major dialects, then in English

and other Earth languages, that launching would take place within a few minutes, he postponed further search.

At the announcement, a few hardy travelers elected to "take it standing", but the vast majority hurried to their staterooms or adjusted themselves in the public percussion seats.

THE WELL-NIGH bone-crushing experiences of early space travel had been overcome to an extent by anti-gravity fields and the achievement of more gradual acceleration. Still, there were sure to be a few minutes of severe discomfort during both acceleration and deceleration. Harlan had experienced the ordeal on his occasional trips to the Moon, and he preferred to minimize the distress by lying on his stateroom couch with its pressure-absorbing construction.

It wasn't so bad this time. If anything, Venusian vessels were easier on the takeoff than their Earth counterparts. When the acceleration period was over, he resumed the attempt to make contact with his charge.

His stateroom was on the deck below the sumptuous quarters assigned to La-ura Lu and other notables. As her military escort, it was understood that he would have access to those sacred precincts. But at the foot of the companionway, he was stopped by a green-skinned sentry.

As the sentry spoke no English and Harlan spoke no Venusian, the attempt to explain his status proved to be wasted effort. He was turning away angrily when an officer wearing an imposing array of purple braid hurried toward them.

The officer took in the situation at a glance. "You Capitan Drake, of course. I most happy to greet you. Ignorant guard should have been informed." He rattled off a string of sing-song syllables, whereat the guard bowed and touched the back of one

hand to his breast—the Venusian salute.

"It not occur more again," the officer assured Harlan. "You free to go wherever you prefer. I am Kola Koom—equivalent of Lieutenant Koom in you language. I hope we make good friends."

The Lieutenant appeared anxious to ingratiate himself. He was a former exchange student, partly educated in a Terrestrial university. He was proud of his proficiency in the English language, and at least had succeeded in overcoming the Venusian lisp.

Considering that the encounter took place with one of the very few officers on board who spoke English, Harlan strongly suspected that the sentry's misunderstanding had been prearranged.

"You privileged to visit Princess whenever you have wish," declared Koom. "For matter of fact, she request pleasure of you to dine with her this evening. For meantime, what you say to enjoy preliminary drink with me, prior to personal-conducting tour of vessel?"

It seemed advisable to fall in with Koom's suggestion, especially since Cleo had taken the initiative in paving the way for an early moment together.

WHILE THEY were having the "preliminary drink", Kola Koom confided, "I try make you enjoy trip. You have plenty time on you hands. Venusian authorities realize that purpose of send you along as military escort merely polite gesture. Where else Princess be more secure than on one of own vessels?"

"Where indeed?" conceded Harlan. "Still, you understand, I have my duty to perform. I'm expected to keep an eye on her."

"Not unpleasant duty, eh?" The Venusian emphasized his remark with

a nudge in the ribs. "You Earthmen! What way you have with our women. No wonder our complexions differ from yours—we green with envy." Koom laughed delightedly at his feeble joke.

In the next two hours, Harlan gained a fairly comprehensive picture of the space vessel. The uppermost levels contained the operating, observation, and control chambers as well as living quarters for officers and technicians. The four levels next below were devoted to passenger accommodations, including lounges and other public rooms. The main dining room was located on the lowest of these, the fifth level. On the fourth level were living quarters for a considerable portion of the non-technical staff, also a fully equipped hospital and medical dispensary. Harlan noted that the green-hued nurses wore white uniforms evidently copied from the conventional Earth nurse's garb.

Below this level were storage facilities, the heating units, generators which created gravity and anti-gravity fields, and other machinery incidental to operation of the rocket-propelled craft. Koom appeared anxious to answer all questions, yet it was apparent to Harlan that portions of the vessel and phases of its operation were deftly circumvented by his guide.

At the appointed hour, Kola Koom left him at the door of the Princess's cabin-suite. "Shall look for join you tomorrow," he said in parting. "Have not forget promise to give lesson in Venusian game of tafoo."

Part of Koom's job, Harlan reflected, must be to see that the Earthman's time was occupied as fully as possible.

A giggling green-tinted maid answered the door. A moment later, Cleo appeared, as alluring as any man could desire in her Venusian paucity of costume. "Big Earth Capitan make

La-ura Lu ver' happy," she assured, looking archly into his eyes. "You glad you come thee La-ura Lu?"

"It was gracious of your highness to invite me," he responded stiffly.

A MOST annoying handicap in their association was the restriction, repeatedly drummed into their ears during the briefing which preceded the voyage, that they must behave at all times exactly as if Cleo were the real La-ura Lu. There was no knowing when they might be under observation. Listening and viewing devices could be—and probably were—concealed in every wall, every nook and cranny of the vessel. Undoubtedly, such spying apparatus was focused upon them now—not because of any suspicion of the Princess, but to insure her safety and keep Harlan under observation. Communication between them must be accomplished surreptitiously. For this purpose, a few simple code signals had been arranged.

Thus, when the Princess touched a finger to the lobe of her pointed left ear, Harlan knew that special significance would attach to her next words or action. She led him to the compact dining nook and casually adjusted his napkin while indicating which place he was to occupy. He permitted his hand to rest on the napkin as he sat down; beneath it he could feel a small, elongated object.

Under cover of spreading the napkin on his lap, he transferred the object to a pocket of his jacket. He knew what it must be, and its possession gave him a sense of relief.

The evening, so far as Harlan was concerned, proved intensely frustrating. The brazenly flirtatious advances of his hostess served only to make him uncomfortable. They didn't represent the real Cleo—even though she no doubt took a mischievous delight in embarrassing him. She looked and

acted so much the part of an alien that it was difficult to think of her as Cleo.

It was a relief when he could escape from her cloying presence to his stateroom. There, he went through a prearranged ritual. First, he took from his traveling case the regulation army death-ray pistol, or blaster, which he had been permitted to send, but not to carry, on board. This he placed under his pillow. It was a natural act, and very likely gave whoever might be spying upon him a mild chuckle, for the capsule containing its death-dealing charge had beyond doubt been neutralized, either when his luggage was sent on board or while he was occupied with Koom or the Princess.

He undressed, donned pajamas, and turned out the light. Then, hiding his movements beneath the covers, he exchanged the capsule in the death-ray pistol for the active one he had palmed from under the napkin—one which, relying upon her exemption from search, Cleo had smuggled on board. In the morning, he must contrive to drop the discarded capsule into a public waste-disposal unit. It wouldn't do to employ the waste unit in his stateroom, for everything that went into it was sure to be noted.

Thereafter, he carried the pistol in its holster, to the amusement, it may be assumed, of those who supposed that it had been rendered useless. Actually, it should now be good for at least fifty death-dealing discharges before renewal would be necessary.

ON VENUSIAN as well as on Earth interplanetary vessels, it was customary to dim all lights during the sleep period. This alternation of light and dark on the Uno-canabe corresponded to the length of the Venusian day, which differed so little from the Terrestrial day that Earth passengers could readily accustom them-

selves to it. On the second "day" out, while Harlan was chafing under the teasing of the supposed Princess on her cabin deck, Kola Koom approached.

"So regretful to disturb tete-a-tete," the Venusian officer apologized, "but thought best to prepare you for announcement. We are changing course—putting in at Earth moon."

Harlan simulated surprise. "But that's not on schedule. What's up?"

"Rocket tube have sustained severe impairment," Koom responded dejectedly. "Result of which we are compelled to make emergency landing for repairs."

Harlan contented himself with trying to look properly dismayed. The Princess clapped her hands.

"Now La-ura Lu get thee moon!" she exclaimed. "When we make landing?"

"It not be long. Announcement come maybe in half hour," Koom answered, before he hurried importantly away.

For an unguarded instant, Harlan and the supposed Princess exchanged significant glances. Her hand sought his and her fingers tightened with a pressure that seemed to say, "Well, this is it!"

This time, he did not draw away his hand. With eyes averted, he was aware of her, not as the Princess La-ura Lu, but as Cleo Spahr, an unspoiled Earth maiden courageously facing danger for the world they both loved—and at the moment more than a little frightened.

He felt an almost uncontrollable impulse to sweep her into his arms and reassure her. But people who live in goldfish bowls cannot afford the luxury of yielding to emotions. He returned the pressure of her hand, but that was all.

PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENT of a change in course "for emergency repairs" and warning to prepare for deceleration, came just then in its usual succession of linguistic variations. It created a good deal of excitement among the passengers. But there was grumbling when a supplementary announcement warned that no one would be permitted to leave the vessel.

Harlan overheard an American businessman explaining the order to his wife. "The Earth government wouldn't let them land without this stipulation. You can't blame 'em. They'd be chumps to let greenies swarm over the place. I wouldn't trust one of 'em as far as you can toss an elephant on Jupiter."

The Princess turned appealingly to Harlan. "No let La-ura Lu thee Moon?" she protested. "What harm La-ura Lu do?"

She was no longer Cleo Spahr but the spoiled, green-tinted Princess of Venus. Harlan withdrew his hand.

"Let's hope they made an exception for you," he suggested. Again they were acting their deadly serious parts for the benefit of whoever might be listening.

For a disabled vessel, the Unocanabe made a creditable landing within the huge Lunar air lock. Harlan felt curious to know how the greenies would set about circumventing the ban against passenger landings. Koom did not leave him long in the dark.

"Your government exercise commendable caution to allow no embarkation on Moon," he said approvingly. "However, our commander have take liberty of suggest to Lunar authorities that in case of Princess La-ura Lu, exception be regarded as very fine gesture of hospitality to distinguished visitor."

"Have they replied?"

"Regret to answer not as yet," re-

sponded Koom. "Perhaps if personal request to Lunar commandant came from you—"

Harlan clapped him on the shoulder. "I'll do better than that. Suppose I send a radiogram to the Supreme Commissioner of Defense, asking him to extend this invitation to the Princess?"

Koom made no effort to hide his exultation. "You are most excellent good fellow," he declared fervently.

THE RESPONSE to Harlan's message was immediately favorable—a circumstance which hardly occasioned him surprise. General Alonzo Bates, commandant of the Lunar post, came on board to tender the invitation in person. He was received with all military honors by Kol Hajma, commanding officer of the Uno-canabe.

Through interpreters, General Bates declared that the Lunar outpost would be honored to extend its hospitality to the Princess La-ura Lu. Unfortunately, he apologized, this invitation from the Earth government did not include any other except the Princess's military escort, Captain Harlan Drake.

After the General had left the vessel, Kola Koom took pains to assure Harlan that his superiors thoroughly understood the Earth government's position. "You cannot take chance of admitting spies, little as we of Venus would think of resort to such underhanding method. But in case of Princess, there is obviously no such danger. To consider such unsophisticated chit of a girl of menace to your safety is laughable."

"Oh, obviously," was Harlan's response.

The time for the visit was set for mid-afternoon of the same day period, but when Harlan called for the Princess at the appointed hour, he received a shock. It required only a glance at the Princess's dejected fea-

tures to reveal that something was wrong.

"La-ura Lu no like," she declared, with her best Venusian pout. "Come word La-ura Lu not go now—maybe go later."

"Not go!" he repeated, startled. Even if she had not touched her ear with the gesture that signified special significance behind the remark, the undercurrent of anxiety beneath her petulance would have alarmed him. "What's wrong?"

Her bare shoulders undulated in an expressive shrug. "No tell La-ura Lu what wrong. Only tell her no go."

Apprehensive, puzzled, Harlan hunted up Kola Koom. He obtained little satisfaction from the Venusian lieutenant, whose manner somehow struck him as evasive.

"Merely slight misunderstanding," Koom assured him. "Our commanding officer much disturb over extent of breakdown. Engineers submit calamitous report that one of main rocket tubes burned out. This necessitate further delay to await replacement from Earth."

"What's that got to do with the Princess's visit?" Harlan demanded bluntly.

"Agree with you that same should make no difference," Koom hastened to respond. "Convey to Princess personal assurance that matter will be promptly investigated."

TWO HOURS later, Koom was apologetic but he hadn't been able to reach the commanding officer. Kol Hajma was understandably worried over this delay; it would necessitate plotting an entirely new trajectory. "Inform Princess of my regrets."

Harlan carried this unsatisfactory report back to the Princess's suite.

"La-ura Lu no like," she declared emphatically. Her cat-eyes narrowed

with concern.

"I no like either," Harlan returned. "Wish I knew what's back of it all."

He tried not to overemphasize his disturbed state of mind. But Cleo was probably as alarmed as he was. The more he considered it, the more ominous the situation appeared.

In light of his knowledge of the real purpose behind the vessel's emergency landing, Koom's explanation reduced itself to an absurdity. This was not, as appeared on the surface, a mere matter of humoring the whim of a spoiled Princess. The sole purpose for which the vessel had made its landing was being shouldered aside. Why?

What explanation could there be except that Cleo's masquerade had been discovered?

If so, her peril was extreme. He must, at all costs, manage to get her off the vessel before it left the Moon.

An appeal to the commander of the Lunar post would no doubt bring results. The rub was getting a message to him, with the Venusians controlling all channels of communication.

Actually, he could only fume and hope that the initiative would be taken by General Bates himself. If worse came to worst, and the Unocanabe prepared to take off, he might attempt to rescue Cleo from the vessel by force. As a last resort, he could blast her down before the Venusian torture-chambers got her.

In his desperation, Harlan filed a message to John Angstrom, urging him, as Earth's Supreme Commissioner of Defense, to repeat the invitation to Princess La-ura Lu and implying that there had been some hitch. He had no hope that the message would be transmitted but, noticing the Earth-born technician bending over one of the instruments within earshot of the window where messages were filed, he raised his voice to urge, "It's vitally

important that this message be sent without delay."

THERE WAS no sign at the moment that his request had been noticed by the Earthman, but two hours later, as Harlan was moodily gazing through a porthole at the Lunar landing field, the young blond technician strolled toward him.

"Waiting grows monotonous, doesn't it?" he remarked casually. "That's one advantage about having a job. Keeps a fellow occupied. You're Captain Drake, aren't you? I'm Kenneth Oakes."

They shook hands. "I've noticed you in the radio turret," Harlan said. "Wonder how long we're due to stay here."

"Until the replacement part arrives," Oakes replied. "It's on its way right now. Those Temple-eight express jobs are fast, so it shouldn't take long."

"How's reception from here?" Harlan ventured. "I filed an Earth radiogram a couple of hours ago."

"Did you?" Oakes responded. "Well, we're getting through, all right—direct reception within this radius. But there's been so much official communication—over this replacement and the change in course—I'm afraid private messages haven't been getting much attention."

"I see," returned Harlan grimly.

"Call on me if I can be of any service," Oakes told him. With a wave of his hand, he passed on.

Clearly, the technician had come out of his way to tip off Harlan that his message hadn't been sent. Venusian eavesdroppers, spying on the conversation, might have gathered the same inference—but that no longer mattered particularly. If Cleo's impersonation was known, the time for circumpection had passed.

Arrival of the fast freighter from

Earth, bringing the replacement tube, occasioned a demand for observation posts. From a porthole near his stateroom, Harlan was able to view the transfer of the rocket tube by crane from the hold of the transport to the liner. The damaged tube had previously been removed to make way for it.

He was still frowning through the porthole when Kola Koom approached with smiling countenance.

"Departure from Luna will not be long now," assured the Lieutenant. "Our competent engineers have situation well in hand. And I have honor to bring you further good news. Kol Hajma, our commanding officer, have inform your Lunar commander that Princess La-ura Lu intend to pay projected visit without delay. He apologize for mistaken error of interpreting his order."

The announcement dazed Harlan. He had become so thoroughly convinced that the imposture was discovered that for a moment he could not orient himself to the altered situation. Had all his fears been groundless?

Kola Koom's next remark was enlightening. "Good news concern likewise your truly. Our commander have obtain permission for one of Uno-canabe's officers to accompany party, and I am in good fortune to be individual selected."

"So that's the why of it!" exclaimed the Earthman.

EVERYTHING suddenly fell into place. With relief, Harlan realized that the delay had another and vastly less ominous explanation than the discovery of Cleo's impersonation. The wily Venusians had held out for inclusion of this extra member of the party, and Earth headquarters had finally consented. It had no doubt taken a lot of discussion and

exchange of messages between General Bates and Earth headquarters, before an agreement was reached.

Why Earth conceded the point, he could only guess, but Koom's next comment tended to throw light on this phase.

"Regretfully, permission to land do not extend beyond officer quarters. However, it will be pleasant relief to set foot on terra firma, or should say," Koom chuckled appreciatively at his wit, "on Luna firma."

When Harlan called for her, the Princess was taking a bath. She called gaily through the partly closed door, "La-ura Lu happy. La-ura Lu go play on Moon. Big Capitan come too. You happy you come with La-ura Lu?"

"I'm glad it's settled," he told her. "Did you know Kola Koom is to accompany us?" He added meaningly, "I guess I shouldn't have gotten so steamed up about the delay, but the way they were stalling, it looked funny."

"La-ura Lu no hear," she called above her splashing. "Big Capitan come in."

"No thanks," he responded. Confound it, why did Cleo feel that she had to carry her impersonation to such extremes of realism? How did she know he wouldn't take her up on an invitation like that? Some men would.

He was quite unprepared when she emerged, a green-tinted sylph in exactly nothing at all, and crossed to her dressing room, tweaking his ear as she ran past.

"You damned little fool!" he roared when he could get his breath. "Put some real clothes on when we visit this post, or I'll see that you don't go."

"Will do," she called happily. "La-ura Lu be good girl—make nithe tholdier-men on Moon fall in love with

her. You think no can do?"

Harlan grunted. "I think you need a good spanking."

A moment later, she stood before him. "La-ura Lu wear plenty cover-up?" she queried. "You think La-ura Lu pretty?"

HE GLANCED disapprovingly at the ravishing vision she presented. Her idea of covering up seemed to be to add a string or two of jewels to the general paucity of her attire. But he checked the impulse to criticize. Actually, if she had been a real Venusian, he would have thought nothing of it. Different worlds, different customs. "Let's get going."

They joined Kola Koom at the ramp. "We have no need hurry," the officer smilingly assured them. "It take many hour fit new part in place."

The trio were met by General Bates, bluffly cordial, and two of his aides. A few minutes later, they were being introduced to several meticulously uniformed, avid-eyed young men who congregated in the officers' headquarters. Needless to say, where the crowd gathered thickest—like iron filings around a magnet—there might be caught an occasional glimpse, between milling uniforms, of the delicate green skin, flashing smile, and expressive cat-eyes of the delectable La-ura Lu.

"We old fogies," General Bates observed, "will try to make things pleasant for you two gentlemen, while the youngsters show the Princess around. She'll be perfectly safe. Not that I'd trust any one of them." He winked broadly. "But there's safety in numbers."

Harlan accepted the situation with glum resignation. He didn't like the idea of Cleo's batting around with that bunch of "woman-starved officers", as Angstrom called them. Still, he grasped the strategy of the whole

procedure. Kola Koom would be able to report that the spy had ample opportunity to wheedle her way around the fortifications, yet of himself Koom would have seen nothing—would be unable to contradict an item of the report which Cleo, impersonating the spy, would render.

The time passed pleasantly enough. The General had a plentiful supply of liquor, and the meal presently served in his private quarters would have gratified an epicure. Also, by good fortune, there was a television broadcast of a baseball game in the crucial series between the Australian Kangaroos and North American Dodgers.

Koom, an avid baseball fan, declared: "Time come, I make prediction, when Venusians will challenge for interplanetary series with champion Earth team. Maybe not yet ready, but please to recall that we play game only fifty years of your time while game have been in effect many centuries on your planet."

In a garrulous mood, Koom launched into a discussion of the Neidlinger theory, which held that Venus and Earth had originally been colonized by the same race, either from another planet or another solar system.

"We both too similar for contrary conclusion," he declared. "True, different environments create somewhat different evolution. While your race evolved into what to our eyes appear various shades of brown, ours evolved into equal range of green tints. But note that both develop at nearly equal pace—like pair of twins separated in childhood."

GENERAL BATES agreed. "It's been pretty well established that your culture progressed at about the same rate as ours; your scientific development paralleled it. Both planets evolved methods of flying and then

of traversing space at about the same time. Of course, we're more alike now than when the planetary contact was first made, and no doubt we'll continue to go on absorbing each other's customs."

"Venusians still can't eat potatoes," Harlan commented, glancing at Koom's plate. The remark sounded disagreeable, but he could not help it. Somehow, his gorge rose at the thought of Earthmen becoming like Venusians.

Koom retorted, "And Earthians likewise allergic to our delicious fumbra fruit. No matter. Give Venusian scientists time. They will eventually find method to overcome allergic responses."

His pointed assumption that the problem was up to the superior ability of Venusian scientists seemed a deliberate affront. Harlan glowered.

General Bates interrupted what might have developed into a dispute. "Lock Number Four is opening up. The party must be returning."

They arrived within a few minutes—La-ura Lu bubbling over with excitement, the young men who had accompanied her more avid-eyed than ever.

"Gloriouth!" she exclaimed. "Lovey boyth take La-ura Lu all over Moon—deep down inthide."

"And in meantime," Koom informed her affably, "we have been recipient of most enjoyable hospitality. Could wish you experienced pleasure of delicious meal we are concluding."

"We have lovely dinner too," the Princess assured him. "Down deep in big cavern where," she turned to a tall young major who stood protectively at her side, "what you call big hole where long round thing keep turning?"

Bates, "We ate at the East Wing construction camp. She," he glanced down at the Princess, "seemed to relish the experience."

Bates frowned but offered no comment. The "long round thing" which kept turning suggested an earth-boring mechanism to Harlan's mind. If this had been the real La-ura Lu, it would have been disastrous to let her see how much of the projected Lunar fortification was still in its early construction stage.

Possibly sensing Harlan's disapproval, one of the officers on the fringe of the crowd confided, "The girl hasn't the slightest idea what it's all about. You ought to hear the silly questions she asked. Not a brain in her head." The youngster sighed. "But she sure is pretty."

Harlan grunted. Evidently Cleo had "put it over". The real Princess could not better have acted the part of a frivolous nit-wit who was in reality getting to see everything she wanted.

The young officers clung to their guest until they were forced to part at the Uno-canabe's boarding ramp. The girl was cloyingly sweet to one and all. In the pangs of parting, she impulsively flung her arms around the tall young major. Other officers separated the two from what threatened to prove the longest clinch on record, and demanded their share. La-ura Lu wound up by kissing each of them and would have started on a second round if Harlan, helped by an amused Kola Koom, had not seized her arms and forcibly led her up the ramp.

Seething, he escorted her to her deck level. At her door, he gritted, "Did you have to go so far?"

She looked up at him with arch surprise. "No want La-ura Lu have good time?" she queried. "No want her be happy?"

"If that makes you happy, go to it!" he retorted angrily. "No decent

SOMEWHAT uncomfortably, the Major explained to General

Earth-girl—" he stopped abruptly. After all, Cleo was merely playing her part. In a calmer tone, he asked meaningly, "Think everything went all right?"

For answer, she drew his head down and kissed him lingeringly. "Everything right," she whispered, as she turned to go into her cabin.

WITH THE Princess's visit accomplished, Harlan noted sardonically how quickly the engineers finished their task of installing the new equipment and getting the vessel under way. They had taken elaborate precautions to make the landing seem justified—even to the point of wrecking the tube which they removed from the vessel. Had it not been for the alertness of Earth's intelligence system, the whole plan might well have gone through without arousing suspicion even to the personally conducted tour of an actual spy.

Actually, the dangerous part of the mission lay ahead. Harlan had already experienced several hours of anxiety for Cleo's safety. His worry had proved unfounded, but it was far from pleasant to look forward to more intense and more surely justified suspense in the future.

One worry was the possibility that he would not be allowed to go with her when she delivered her report. Cleo was supposed to solve this problem by taking a desperate fancy to her Earth guard and insisting that he accompany her. But how much would her whims count if Venusian authorities held other ideas?

Worst of all was the barrier against talking over their problems together. Under the constant probability that they were being observed, their conversation was limited to unsatisfying banalities.

At the outset, Harlan had been thrilled by the prospect of protecting

the Earth girl of his dreams. The actuality was disillusioning. He felt little sense of Cleo's companionship, so definitely had she assumed the personality of La-ura Lu. Many a man would have been content with the substitution. Not being such a man, Harlan took to avoiding her.

Since the Lunar episode, he experienced also a sense of irritation toward Kola Koom and saw as little as he could of the Lieutenant. But he discovered a growing sense of congeniality with Kenneth Oakes, the radio technician. Even though their conversation was limited to trivialities, he instinctively liked and trusted the man. Ken was a quiet, sensible fellow, with a dry sense of humor, and a potential ally.

Under its altered schedule, the Uno-canabe would intercept the orbit of Venus approximately twenty-nine Earth days after its departure from Luna. This meant a period of interminable inaction coupled, in Harlan's case, with mounting anxiety. The passengers overrode the tedium pleasantly enough by a round of entertainments—concerts, dancing, games, and indiscriminate love-making. For the Venusians, this latter was a purely routine pastime—a petting party of no more consequence than a game of bridge or tafoo. Very likely, the freedom from convention which prevailed on a Venusian liner had prompted not a few of the Earth-born travelers to patronize the vessel. Harlan noted that a big share of them were well-to-do businessmen—no doubt pillars of respectability in their home communities. Conceivably they found the lack of restraint a delightful substitute for the familiar convention spree.

BEYOND MILD contempt for the breed, Harlan bestowed on them scant attention, until he realized that his charge was carrying on ostenta-

tious flirtations with some of the more prepossessing specimens. Presumably, Cleo felt it necessary to do this in order to seem in character, but Harlan did not like it—emphatically he did not like it.

He told her so in terms which she could hardly mistake. "Look, Princess, there are limits. You don't have to make love to every male on board just to prove you're Venusian. You ought to hear some of these Earth Lotharios snicker behind your back."

She pretended to misunderstand. "No make mad with La-ura Lu! La-ura Lu love big Earth Capitan—want him love her too." And then he would have to thrust away the clinging arms she twined around him.

He took to prowling the decks at all hours—angry with her, angry with himself, angry with the whole mission. And one night he stumbled back to his stateroom, sickened and shaken, knowing that his whole world had toppled about his ears.

He had been standing near the companionway when he heard a gurgling laugh. A stateroom door had opened and he glanced toward it in time to see an Earthman giving an impassioned farewell kiss to a green-tinted Venusian girl. She giggled again, tore herself away, and ran past Harlan clad in the flimsiest of negligees. Crowding into the obscurity of the cross passage, he watched her trip lightly to the deck above. Then, feeling very sick, he stumbled toward his own quarters.

Unmistakably, the girl was La-ura Lu.

And he knew the stateroom from which she had emerged. It was occupied by an Austrian trader—a boldly handsome fellow of whom Harlan had warned the Princess, "Look out for him. He's unscrupulous and dangerous. What we call a 'lady killer'. A self-respecting Earth girl wouldn't trust

herself alone with him."

Well, he was wrong. An Earth girl had given him the lie. He had been struggling desperately to keep alive his ideal—to excuse Cleo on the grounds that she acted a part of necessity. But now his vision lay in shattered fragments around his feet. In an agony of disillusionment, he buried his head in the pillow of his narrow couch and groaned.

Thereafter, he avoided the Princess more than ever. The girl he had been ready to defend—Cleo Spahr—had ceased to exist. She never had existed, save in his imagination. Seeing her in this new, devastating light, he could no longer think of her as a brave girl who volunteered for a dangerous mission because she loved her world. Her motives were more nearly those of the lecherous males who boarded the vessel. This was her chance to indulge in the freedom and license which she envied Venusian girls.

A day or so later, Kenneth Oakes made a comment which, if it had been uttered earlier in the voyage, would have brought Harlan's fist smashing into his face: "That Princess—pretty hot stuff, isn't she?"

Harlan's only response was a grunt.

"Can't say I'd mind exchanging jobs with you."

"You'd be welcome," was the bitter retort.

Desperately, Harlan longed for the conclusion of the voyage, for an end to the whole undertaking. A man can take just so much.

TWO MORE days to go, and now Venus loomed, a great shining disk, against the blackness ahead. Although the cloud envelope surrounding the planet was not so heavy as had been thought by early-day astronomers, still it was sufficient to obscure the planet's land markings. Not until the vessel circled beneath this

cloud layer would the contours really be visible.

Anxiety concerning the climax of the mission now returned to vex Harlan. Regardless of personal feelings, he had his duty to perform. Moreover, he would have to play up to the supposed Princess from now on. Sufficiently, at least, to give her an outward excuse for demanding his company.

He encountered her on the deck as she was reading a radiogram. At his approach, she rolled the flimsy paper into a ball. "La-ura Lu lonely. Big Capitan no come thee La-ura Lu any more," she pouted. The wadded paper slipped from her fingers.

He planted his foot on it and replied sardonically, "I don't think you've lacked for company."

Her eyes were on his foot. "La-ura Lu drop paper. Give La-ura Lu."

He frowned. She must have dropped it purposely, in order to give him an opportunity to learn its contents. Now, by calling attention to it, she was foiling her own plan. He did not move his foot.

She pushed him away, declaring petulantly, "Want paper."

He bent down, retrieved the pellet, and seemingly pressed it into her extended hand. Perhaps this was her object—to create an opportunity for him to pick up the message.

If she had closed her fingers and pretended to hold the wadded ball, the by-play would have been convincing enough to satisfy any observer. But she stared as if unbelieving at her empty palm.

"No give La-ura Lu paper!" she cried angrily, her cat-eyes narrowed to mere slits. "Play trick on La-ura Lu. No like."

Abruptly, she turned and called to the Venusian sentry loitering near the head of the companionway. The guard approached hostilely and seized

Harlan's hand. Bewildered, Harlan allowed him to snatch the pellet of paper and give it to the Princess. She turned and ran to her cabin.

Dumbfounded, Harlan made his way down the companionway.

OF ONE thing he could be certain. Cleo must have a purpose in acting as she did. The only explanation he could conceive was that she wanted observers to think there was antagonism between them. She had staged a convincing demonstration for this purpose. Yet, if it was necessary to go to such extremes, she must have a reason to feel that she was suspected. He groaned. Now what were they up against?

His next encounter with Kenneth Oakes gave him an idea.

"We must be close to landing," he remarked. "The Princess received a radio message not long ago. That means we're within receiving range for direct radio impulses, I suppose."

"Have been for the last couple of days," Oakes informed him. The technician glanced at his watch. "How about meeting me for a game of tafoo after I get off duty?"

When, some hours later, Harlan went to the game room, he found Oakes sitting at a table waiting for him.

"I'm very much a beginner," Harlan remarked, as he sat down.

"I'm no expert myself," laughed Oakes. He took a notebook from his pocket and tore out a couple of leaves. "It helps if you tabulate your moves as you go along. Try it."

Harlan accepted the proffered slip of paper and they began playing. Tafoo, which holds about the same place of esteem on Venus that chess does on Earth, and somewhat resembles it, is an intricate game, taxing the resources of skillful players. Harlan had learned the rudiments from Kola

Koom, but he was still no match for a fairly experienced player. It required only a few minutes for Kenneth to develop a winning combination which enabled him to cry "Ta-f fool!" in triumph.

Harlan rose. "Guess I'm not in the mood for games today. But thanks for the lesson."

"Keep the record of your game," Oakes remarked. "You can learn a lot from studying your mistakes and letting the lesson soak in."

Later, in the doubtful privacy of his stateroom, Harlan examined the scrap of notebook paper on which he had kept his record. He had no doubt that it contained some response to the request implied when he mentioned that the Princess received a message. "Let the lesson soak in," Kenneth had remarked. That must mean—

Stripping to the waist, Harlan filled the basin in his tiny lavatory. Under cover of laving his face, he dropped the notebook page into the water. The blank side of the sheet was no longer blank. The submerged message burned into his brain as if inscribed in letters of fire.

19485-*40: Gracious Highness: Planetary council requests summary of your conclusions after completing Luna assignment. Reply code 6-86.

+ - 825

+ - 825: Area definitely undeveloped, of little military importance. Advise Planetary council delay Terra negotiations pending detailed report to be rendered you in person.

Operative 19485-*40

The words swam before Harlan's eyes. The shock of their impact was like a physical blow. But for his grip on the edge of the basin, he would have slumped to the floor. This was

treason! The ultimate betrayal of a trust—the betrayal of one's own world. No wonder she had refused to let him see the message. Even then, she was planning to send the reply.

Cleo couldn't be doing this thing. It was inconceivable. She—

LIKE A searing flash of lightning, enlightenment burst upon him. Cleo? Of course Cleo couldn't be doing this! Impossible as it seemed, the girl who sent this message was the real Princess. The green-tinted maiden who had become so strangely uncooperative—who called a sentry to wrest from Harlan the radiogram she did not wish him to see—who visited strange men in their staterooms—was not Cleo. How could he have been so blind?

Contradictory emotions surged over him. Relief at the rediscovery of Cleo. It wasn't Cleo who had so brazenly flouted Earth conventions or Cleo who had turned against him. Dismay. What, then, had happened to Cleo? Something unforeseen and dreadful. It had happened, moreover, right under his eyes. Under the eyes of him whose sacred duty it was to protect her.

Could it be that Cleo never entered the vessel? His whole being rejected this theory. At the outset, there had been an unspoken understanding between them. She had smuggled the death-ray capsule aboard and into his hands. She had been as disturbed as he was at the ominous delay when they arrived at the Moon.

After the departure from Luna—he was less certain. The substitution could have been made—must have been made—during that pause. The real La-ura Lu toured the Lunar fortifications. How else could she have been so definite in her radioed message?

All this now was beside the point. What had become of Cleo? He must

find her. But how?

The only ally he could count upon was Kenneth Oakes. The difficulty involved in appealing to Oakes for help was that he was still probably under constant surveillance. As an Earthman, no doubt Oakes also was closely watched. Nevertheless, after crushing the immersed paper to pulp, Harlan hunted up the technician. He found Ken in the game room, idly watching two Venusians locked in combat over a tafoo board.

After a single glance at Harlan's face, Kenneth suggested, "Come up to my stateroom. I'll dig up those tafoo books I promised to lend you."

His stateroom proved to be a cubbyhole on the ninth level. When they had crowded into it, he closed the door. "All right," he said, crawling onto his bunk so that Harlan might sit on the stool, "what's up? Your face looks as if you'd been through an outpost of hell. We can talk here."

Harlan glanced around apprehensively. "You're sure?"

"I've combed it for listening antennae, and I've rigged up a detector that would tell me if any were installed. What's on your mind?"

"Plenty." Without reservation, Harlan told all that had transpired up to the reading of the enlightening messages which revealed that the whole counter-espionage plan had miscarried.

KENNETH LISTENED gravely.

"It's worse than I thought," he acknowledged. "When you gave me a hint that you'd like to get hold of whatever message the Princess received, I remembered seeing Haj-mah-lo at work with the code book. While he was off duty, I unearthed those originals from his desk. It was a break that they went through coding and decoding, because I'd never have been able to get hold of the actual

messages as transmitted." He pondered. "You think this Earth-girl, Miss Spahr, may still be on board?"

Harlan rejoined despondently, "I don't even know whether she's still alive."

"They'd probably let her live," Oakes surmised. "They'll want to question her—get what information they can—by any means possible."

Harlan winced. "By any means possible—a euphemism for torture."

"We're up against a plenty tough proposition," Oakes admitted. "Parts of this vessel are out of bounds even for most of the native crew. They've a guardhouse, of course—I think it's somewhere on level two. It's the logical place to look for her, but we'd never get close to it. Or she might be—" Oakes paused abruptly, closing his eyes in concentration. "You say the substitution was made about the time the new rocket assembly arrived?"

"That's the way I figure it. When I left Cleo, just before it showed up, she was worried and upset. We both thought something had gone haywire. I watched them unload the rocket tube, and my theory is that the real Princess came aboard inside of it. They smuggled her up to her cabin and got rid of Cleo all within half an hour or so." Harlan's voice rose excitedly. "That's when it must have been, because when I went back to tell her we were going to make the visit after all, she was changed."

"How do you mean, changed?"

"In high spirits, and all that. Of course, I attributed part of it to acting and part to relief. But there were other things." Harlan hesitated. "Well, for example, she ran across the room naked. I ought to have tumbled then. Cleo pretended to be uninhibited, but she'd always manage to keep within bounds. That's when it must have been, all right. Just after the new tube was transferred aboard." He groaned.

"How dumb I was! It's easy to see now why they delayed our excursion. The Princess had escaped, back there on Earth, and managed to get word to the vessel when it landed. So naturally they stalled along until she arrived."

IN HIS despair and self-condemnation, he would have gone on talking, but Oakes checked him. "It clicks!" the technician declared. "When Om Olney—he's chief technician—came back from getting a shot for some ailment—he told us the replacement had arrived. Olney, I might mention, is a sort of Venusian hypochondriac—always discovering new symptoms and worrying about contamination. He mentioned the rocket tube only incidentally. His real concern was that he might have been exposed to dru-hedra. Can you imagine what an outbreak of dru-hedra would mean?"

"It's some kind of virulent sickness, isn't it?"

"Venusians dread it worse than anything. And strangely enough, it seems to originate during space flights. Some kind of a spore, presumably. It's violently contagious and almost always fatal. The only possible way to check it is to isolate the first victims promptly. Well, it seems that while he was waiting for his shot in the hospital, Olney saw them carrying some one into the isolation ward on a stretcher, and they were so hush-hush about it that he became frightened. Naturally, if there was a case of dru-hedra on board, they'd keep it quiet for fear of starting a panic."

Harlan rose excitedly. His head bumped against a beam near the ceiling and he sat down abruptly. "Sure, it clicks," he declared. "They'd give her something to make her unconscious, then hurry her out of sight. Did Olney notice whether this stretch-

er case was a man or woman?"

"No. They'd covered the body with a sheet. That helped to scare him. There's a peculiar pallor to a dru-hedra victim—something like the change in color caused by potato sickness. And its early symptoms are much the same—cramps, weakness, and nausea."

"I feel better already," asserted Harlan. "The big thing is to know where she is."

"Sure," responded Kenneth dryly. "All we have to do now is get her out. A mere detail." He glanced at his watch. "I'll have to get back on the job. Here—take these tafoo books. You've become an addict of the game."

They emerged from his cubbyhole discussing one of the finer points of tafoo.

Returning to his stateroom, Harlan spent some time ostensibly looking over the small library which Oakes had entrusted to him. But the text and diagrams were a blur before his eyes. His brain was seething with plans for rescuing Cleo—some of them wild and all of them, in the final analysis, impracticable.

His whole being craved action, but he was sane enough to realize that a precipitate move would only endanger Cleo further. There still remained several hours before landing. Something might occur within those hours to give him a break. He decided to go down to the hospital level and look the situation over.

AN AIR of excitement throughout the passenger decks and the popularity of observation posts attested to the fact that Venus was very close. At almost any time, deceleration would take place.

This suggested an idea. Some constitutions were so affected by the added gravity that they needed hospital

care. If he could convince those in charge that he was one of those unfortunates, the ruse would at least get him into that section.

The presence of two armed guards at the hospital entrance struck Harlan as significant. He could not recall having noticed them during his tour of inspection with Koom early in the voyage. Why should guards be needed at this particular entrance?

A green-tinted nurse-receptionist peered smilingly at Harlan from her window beside the closed entrance. In her approximation of English, she inquired, "You want thee thome one?"

"Well, not exactly," he acknowledged. "Are visitors permitted?"

"You got permit?"

"No."

"Thorry. No can do."

"Look here," he began. "I've got a weak heart. When this deceleration starts, I'll need care. That's why I want to get into the hospital."

The girl reached for a bottle and took two pellets from it. "You take kilo-tablet for heart," she instructed. "Take two."

He accepted the tablets gingerly. "I think I'd better be hospitalized."

"Thorry." The nurse shook her head. "Hothpital full up."

He peered beyond the guards, trying to ascertain where the corridors branched from the long central hall. In all probability, the isolation ward would be at the far end. When the green-skinned sentries showed restiveness, he turned away. They had probably received special instructions to keep him out. Even if he drew his pistol and forced his way in, he would succeed only in giving the greenies an excuse for blasting him or putting him behind bars.

He ascended slowly to the next level. From the dining room, which occupied the space above, he might get

an idea of the hospital area.

THE BIG room was open but unoccupied. Few would care to eat until after the deceleration. While he stood in the doorway, looking the place over, a medley of shouts and frenzied shrieking reached his ears. Although the words were Venusian, their unmistakable appeal for help brought him on the run to the swinging kitchen doors.

There he paused, hesitating to interfere but revolted by the sight of two Venusian cooks unmercifully beating a small bus boy of their own race. The boy cowered beneath the blows, his face contorted with pain and terror, while he shrieked under the punishment. When one of the cooks picked up a long-handled basting spoon and started using it in place of his fists, Harlan stepped forward. "Hey! You can't do that!"

The yelling abruptly stopped, as all three looked at the intruder. Then the cook gestured with his basting spoon toward the doors, calling out something no doubt highly insulting.

"All right," conceded Harlan, turning away. "I've no business interfering. But you—" he shook his fist threateningly— "lay off that kid."

At this moment, the public address system blared forth an announcement. The Venusian version, as usual, was followed by its English equivalent: "Prepare for deceleration. All passengers warned to retire to their state-rooms and lie down, or to find percussion chairs available in public rooms. Deceleration begins immediately."

The warning was repeated in various Venusian dialects and Earth languages. At the first announcement, the two cooks scurried away. The bus boy jabbered something as he pointed after them. Harlan wasted valuable moments trying to grasp what the youngster was trying to tell him.

Abruptly, the boy ran off in the direction taken by the chefs. Harlan caught a last glimpse of him over a mountainous heap of peeled potatoes. An instant later, he became aware of oppressive weight. The deceleration had commenced.

He lurched toward the dining-room doors, but the overpoweringly increased gravity brought him to his knees, then to the floor. He lay there, unable to move, feeling as if some monstrous pressure were forcing him through the unyielding surface.

"I'm in for it now," was the last thought that passed through his mind before he partially blacked out.

He returned to full consciousness feeling as if every bone in his body had been subjected to bruising punishment. Something was running down his cheek and he put his hand there to find it covered with blood. A trickle was still running from his nose.

When he started to lift himself by the leverage of his hands, they slipped in ooze and he plummeted into the slimy mess. The floor was covered with it. More was dripping from the table almost above him.

IT TOOK A minute to identify the substance as mashed potato—another minute to realize that the mashing had been accomplished by gravity. The heap of peeled potatoes he had noticed before he fell was now this mass of ooze. Probably meant for the next meal to be served Terrestrial diners, because no Venusian would have risked contaminating his diet with Earth's favorite vegetable.

He glanced around, curious to see what havoc had been wrought. Not much, apparently. On the long range which occupied one side of the kitchen were various kettles and cauldrons, but the heat controls apparently had turned off automatically.

While he still sat on the floor, surveying with distaste the whitish slime which soiled his uniform, he caught a glimpse of the bus boy furtively stealing across the room. The boy scurried toward the potato table, so engrossed in his purpose that he failed to see the Earth-man. While Harlan watched curiously, the boy caught up a long-handled dipper and scooped it full of potato mash. Then he ran to the range and dumped his dipper-full into one of the kettles. He was furtively returning for more when he saw Harlan.

Instantly, the boy dropped to his knees. "Unga pewee!" he begged piteously. "Unga pewee! Na hoobla mehi."

Gingerly, Harlan regained his feet. "At a guess," he responded, "you're asking me not to tell." A slow grin broke over his face as he surmised the truth. "I get it. You're revenging yourself by putting potato mash into your boss's soup. All right, boy. Unga Pewee—I won't tell. Fact is," he declared, "I'm going to help you!"

He reached for a dipper and scooped it full of potato mash. "Come on, kid," he called. "Get busy." He ran to the range and dumped the contents of his dipper into a kettle. The boy gave a delighted yelp and joined in.

It was more of a subconscious urge than a definite purpose that egged Harlan on—but an idea was taking shape. Potatoes made Venusians sick. If enough of them became ill, there'd be just that much less vigilance to interfere with any rescue plan he might evolve.

The two worked feverishly, dashing from table to range and back again. The boy, Harlan noticed, paid special attention to a huge cauldron filled with what he judged from the aroma to be canadra soup, relished not only

by Venusians but by Earth epicures as well.

SUDDENLY, the boy dropped his dipper and pushed Harlan toward the door. The Earthman took this to mean that the cooks were returning. It seemed a propitious moment for him to fade from the picture.

He crossed the dining room in record time and returned to the seventh level for a badly needed change of uniform. In those first moments of returning activity, no one seemed to notice his soiled condition. He heard a good many angry comments at the lack of time allowed passengers before deceleration began. Evidently he was not the only person unable to reach a percussion couch.

The vessel now was well within the Venusian stratosphere, circling the planet at a fairly low speed, preparatory to descending through the clouds. Its maneuvers would occupy some ten or twelve hours—which meant to Harlan that he had no longer than that in which to devise some desperate scheme for rescuing Cleo.

He waited impatiently for Kenneth Oakes to complete his spell of duty. When the technician joined him, Harlan remarked, "Thought I'd better return these before we land." He indicated the tafoo books under his arm.

Together they ascended to Ken's cubbyhole, where the host first took the precaution of checking walls and ceiling with the contrivance he called a detector.

"All clear," he observed. "Anyway, I doubt whether they consider it worth while to spy on you, now that they have things their own way. And that," he added wryly, "is an understatement."

Harlan's face fell. He had somehow counted upon Ken's coming up with an idea.

"You might appeal to the Terres-

trial consul, after landing," the technician said glumly. "He could demand Miss Spahr's release—kick up a fuss. But as I see it, the Venusians merely have to stand pat. Their passenger lists and Earth's customs records will show that no such person entered the vessel. La-ura Lu will swear that she was on board from the beginning. They can make your claims sound preposterous."

"What a lot of help you turned out to be!"

"I'm merely facing facts. If you've got any ideas, count on me to help carry them out."

"Sorry." Harlan placed his hand contritely on the other's arm. "It's just that—that everything looks so black. By the way, you'll probably consider this childish, but I..." He described his visit to the kitchen and the dosing of Venusian food with potato mash.

Oakes laughed immoderately. "There'll be some very indignant greenies around here after the next meal," he predicted. "Still, I don't see what you hoped to accomplish."

"It might disrupt things a bit."

"Not very much. Potato sickness is disagreeable, but not serious. It causes headaches, dizziness, cramps. But the crew will go about their business pretty much as usual."

HARLAN SPOKE with grim determination. "Ken, I'm going to get into that hospital. I'll do it if I have to blast the guards and all the rest of the staff."

"Suppose you do. Once inside, what then?"

"I'll break into that isolation ward somehow. If she's there, I'll find her."

Kenneth nodded. "Offhand, I can't think of a surer way to get yourself knocked off—or locked in a guard room, where you'd be of no earthly use."

"Show me a better idea."

"I can't. And for that reason only, I'm throwing in with you. It's crazy—but we've got to go down trying." He pulled a locker from under his bunk and took a blaster from it. "Anyway, we can account for a few of the greenies before they wipe us out."

The hopelessness of the undertaking was apparent. "I don't want you along," Harlan said gruffly. "I've got to do something, but there's no point in dragging you into the mess."

Kenneth ignored the protest. "Come on," he said. He opened the stateroom door just as a Venusian was raising his hand to knock.

For a moment, Harlan thought the greenie had been eavesdropping. A glance at his contorted features banished this thought. The Venusian wore a uniform similar to Ken's, but with more purple braid on it—the uniform of a technician. His skin was the hue of pale mustard. He jabbered something to Kenneth, then staggered and fell, to lie whimpering against the corridor wall.

Ken turned a startled face toward Harlan. "This is Om Olney. He's got it!"

"What do you mean? Got what?"

"The dru-hedra. You know—I told you about it. He must have caught it from that stretcher victim. I'm ordered to take his place in the radio turret." He started in the direction leading to the turret, ran some twenty feet, then stopped. "What am I thinking of?" he demanded. "I'm going with you."

The Venusian raised his head. "Onga moo," he shouted. "Onga la bru!"

Ken seized Harlan by the arm. "Come on," he urged. "He's ordering me back on the job. We'll have to hurry, before some of the guards show up."

Harlan resisted the pressure. His world had toppled around him once more. "Ken, don't you see? If that was a case of dru-hedra on the stretcher—if Olney caught it—it couldn't have been Cleo."

They faced each other in dismay.

"Well," Kenneth responded uncertainly, "she's somewhere. And the hospital is a good bet to start with."

WITHOUT a glance at the vehemently protesting Om Olney, they hurried toward the companionway. As they neared the passenger levels, they paused to listen. A confused murmur reached their ears, a wailing crowd murmur. "Funny," observed Ken. "I wonder..."

At the foot of the next flight, a girl lay prostrate, a Venusian girl in the uniform of a maid. She raised her arms in supplication.

"Dru-hedra!" she moaned. Her skin was beaded with perspiration and had the same sickly mustard hue as Olney's. She repeated the agonized cry, then fell back, limp and sobbing.

Compassionately, Kenneth scooped up the miserable figure in his arms. "This kid may get us into the hospital," he said, as if apologizing.

On the next level, they encountered more writhing and moaning victims. Harlan picked up a cowering girl and hurried after Ken. Victims were everywhere now—some lying prostrate, some staggering along the halls or trying to pull themselves up the stairs, crowding the escalators. Wailing and lamentation filled the air.

Even if they had not carried plague victims, they would have had no difficulty in entering the hospital. One of the sentries lay on his back, writhing with agony; the other was nowhere in sight. The receptionist's window was vacant, but nurses were scurrying distractedly through the

corridors.

"Tell 'em we're supposed to put these gals in the isolation ward," Harlan muttered.

Kenneth forced the attention of one of the nurses, speaking peremptorily in Venusian. The girl broke away, making some vehement denial.

"She says it's forbidden to go in there," Ken translated. "We'll have to find the head nurse and—"

His words were drowned by the sudden blare of the public address system. This time, the opening announcement came in English: "Terrestrials, attention. Section 589, Interplanetary Spaceways Code, gives the commander of any vessel power to declare an emergency and order passengers into active service. Such emergency is hereby declared. There has been an outbreak of dru-hedra, a virulent disease to which your race is not susceptible. All Earth men and women are ordered to stand by. Unless otherwise indicated, your duties are to maintain order, serve as stretcher bearers, assist the stricken to their staterooms or the hospital, administer medicines which will be dispensed from stations to be set up on each level. Any who have had nursing or medical training shall report immediately to the hospital on level four. All who understand navigation, or who can serve in any technical capacity, are commanded to report to the chief officer. This is a serious emergency. Your lives depend upon willing, efficient cooperation."

"It's going to be a mess," Oakes declared. "I never saw the plague hit a vessel, but I've heard it's terrible. Most of the victims are certain to die, and the rest—" A startled look came into his eyes. Unceremoniously depositing the girl he had been carrying on the floor, he said, "Let's get out of here. I've something to tell you."

HARLAN PLACED his own burden beside the other girl and followed Ken toward the far end of the main corridor. In all probability, the isolation ward lay in that direction.

The cross corridor was empty—a relief after the confusion through which they had passed. The moment they were alone, Ken doubled up in a paroxysm of laughter.

"This dru-hedra!" he gasped, between spasms of mirth. "This dreadful plague!"

Mystified, Harlan waited for him to get control of himself. It seemed a gruesome subject for merriment.

"Don't you get it?" exploded Ken. "It's the potato sickness! Boy, oh boy! What a spot you'd be in if they knew!"

Somehow, the disclosure didn't strike Harlan as funny. He felt almost frightened at the havoc his prank had wrought.

"If your idea was to disrupt things, you've succeeded. So the person under that sheet wasn't a dru-hedra victim and, by Jupiter, there's the isolation ward." He pointed to a closed door at the end of the passage.

"How do you know?"

"Perhaps because I'm psychic. Also because the little sign over the door says so. Well, we're here, now what?" He tried the door; it was locked. "At a guess, I'd say it's made of durulium."

Already, Harlan was racing back along the corridor. "Come along. I've an idea."

By this time, a guard had been re-established at the hospital entrance. Two armed Venusians and one burly Earth man held back a screaming mob of tottering, swaying sick people who clamored for admittance. "Hospital's full!" the Earthman roared futilely. "Can't you greenies understand English?"

Harlan and his companion managed

to work their way through the mob. The escalators were jammed. They made better time by dashing up one companionway after another. Breathless, they arrived at the door of Princess La-ura Lu's cabin.

A terrified maid barred their way. They brushed her aside. "Tell her we've been commanded to take her mistress to the hospital," Harlan called. Without ceremony, he entered the royal sleeping chamber.

Princess La-ura Lu was very sick. The mustard-like pallor was woefully unbecoming to her, and the look of fear on her face would have awakened pity if Harlan had taken time to observe it.

"Dru-hedra!" she moaned. "La-ura Lu die. Oh, Captain, no let La-ura Lu die. No wanna die!"

"That's why I came, Princess," he assured her. "Take it easy. We're moving you to the hospital."

HE TUCKED a downy coverlet around her and lifted her to his shoulder. They left the apartment, followed by the distracted maid. Somewhere in the descent toward the hospital level, the maid disappeared, very likely struck down by the dread affliction.

On the sixth level, they found a stretcher and deposited the Princess on it. The lower levels were jammed with sick and frightened Venusians, but even so, the announcement, "Make way for the Princess La-ura Lu," called loudly by Kenneth in their language, cleared a path. It opened the portals of the hospital. The Earthman was no longer there, but the Venusian guards were still holding back the crowd, although they looked as if they expected each moment to be their last.

"Those boys haven't eaten yet," commented Ken. "That must be why they're still on their feet."

"Insist upon taking the Princess to the isolation ward," Harlan urged. "Tell them it's orders from the high jumbleorum."

No one paid any attention to them as they carried the Princess down the main corridor and thence to the door of the isolation ward. They deposited the stretcher on the floor while considering the next step. La-ura Lu raised her head inquiringly just as a nurse, with a bunch of keys dangling from her wrist, hurried toward them.

"This is your room," Harlan told the Princess. "Tell the nurse you're supposed to be taken in there."

There followed a somewhat hysterical three-cornered conversation between La-ura Lu, the nurse, and Ken. The general trend was clear enough. The nurse had orders to admit no one to that section, and she intended to obey. Oakes shrugged, then stepped behind the nurse. He had raised his blaster for a blow which would certainly have stilled her tongue, when she swayed, clapped both hands to her head, and fell to the floor, screaming the dreaded word, "Dru-hedra!"

Pocketing his weapon, Kenneth bent over the nurse and slipped the keys from her wrist. A moment later, he had the door unlocked.

The isolation ward consisted of a small antechamber opening into three separate rooms. Two were empty. In the third lay a green-skinned girl. Harlan's heart gave a leap of exultation, for the girl was a living replica of the Princess.

LIVING? FOR a moment, he feared she wasn't. She gave no sign of awareness when he burst into the room. Her eyes were closed as if in sleep. But she breathed.

"Drugged!" muttered Ken. "Let's make the switch and get out of here."

A moment later, they emerged, bearing the stretcher, and locked the

door.

The stricken nurse had dragged herself to the entrance of the passage. Ken pushed the keys into her hand with a word of assurance.

"I told her we'd decided to take the Princess back to her own quarters," he explained. "She might have tried to raise an alarm."

Unopposed and unquestioned, they carried Cleo back the way they had come. What were two stretcher bearers among so many? The chaos seemed to be increasing rather than diminishing.

Harlan grimly shouldered his way through the victims. Strange how a simple allergy could be augmented by fear until it became a major disaster. It wouldn't be surprising if some died of it; they were frightened enough. Devoutly he hoped they wouldn't; he already had enough on his conscience.

The maid was nowhere in sight. This was fortunate, because Harlan noticed, as soon as they deposited Cleo on the Princess' bed, that her own blonde hair color showed plainly at the roots, and patches of white Earth flesh were in evidence on her scalp and around her eyes and mouth.

"We've got to bring her to," he said tensely. "What do you suppose she's drugged with?"

"No telling. I'll see what I can learn from one of the medical dispensaries."

Ken returned in a few minutes. "Found a station manned by one of their own medicos," he reported. "He hasn't been attacked by the plague and he's putting two and two together—attributes it to having been so busy attending a patient that he had no time to eat."

"You mean he's caught on?"

"No; he took another angle. Thinks dru-hedra must be caused by food contamination. He's going to have everything in the kitchen analyzed after they land."

"Oh, oh!"

"Yeah," he's in for something of a shock. But that's beside the point. I told him our patient had taken an overdose of something—we didn't know what. He gave me a restorative that's supposed to counteract the effects of the more common sleep-producing drugs. Has to be administered hypodermically."

Gingerly, he thrust the hypodermic needle into the girl's arm and pressed the plunger.

THERE SEEMED no immediate effect. They watched the regular breathing of the green-tinted sleeper for several minutes. Harlan's hopeful expression faded.

"Give it time," Ken counseled.

The words had scarcely left his lips when Cleo gave a shuddering sigh and opened her eyes. She saw Harlan looking down at her and smiled.

"What is this?" she asked. "You look as if—" A startled memory froze the words. "Goodness! I forgot. I'm supposed to be the Princess. Or—am I?" She sat up, looking in some confusion at her green-hued hands.

At that moment, more than anything in the world Harlan wanted to take her in his arms and pour out the love and relief that flooded his heart. The presence of Ken restrained him. But his voice was husky with relief. "Look, Cleo, we haven't much time. I'll bring you up to date." He told her all that had transpired as he knew or surmised it. On her part, she had little to tell. "I was waiting for you—wondering what could have happened to change their plan about having me visit the Lunar fortifications—when Kola Koom came to my door. There were two other officers with him. I started to ask a question; just as Koom jabbed something into my arm. I don't...remember anything else. Has it actually been twenty-nine

days?"

"We're about to land," Harlan responded.

"Then," she exclaimed excitedly, "it's not too late. I can still do what I set out to do."

"Too late for that," Harlan reminded her. "The message La-ura Lu sent to the headquarters guy—this plus-minus 825—spilled the beans."

"But I can claim it was a mistake."

"You could," Kenneth interposed, "except for the fact that the real La-ura Lu is going to recover from her stomach upset in a few hours and stir up quite a fuss."

CLEO SANK back against her pillow. "Oh," she said, in a deflated voice. "Yes, I see."

Kenneth and Harlan looked at each other uneasily. The implications of the situation were all too clear.

Ken abruptly started for the door. "Go ahead with your plans," he said. "I'll guarantee that the Princess won't interfere."

Harlan let him go. He had business with Cleo which couldn't wait any longer. But he caught up with the other at the foot of the companionway.

"Keep out of this, Ken," he said gravely.

"Go back to Cleo. She needs you."

"Nothing doing. It's my job—not yours."

Both glanced up as Cleo, clad in one of the Princess' charming negligees, came running down the companionway.

"Could you get a message off to this plus-minus 825? Tell him I'm sick with the plague and quarantined, so he'll have to meet me at the spaceport—that it's imperative."

"I can try," Ken replied. "Things are no doubt disorganized in the radio turret."

"Then—please do. Meanwhile, I'll

get to work on my makeup." She hurried back to her cabin.

Harlan allowed himself a wry smile. "Okay, Ken. You've got your job mapped out. I'll do mine."

Kenneth shrugged. "I guess you win."

On this note, they parted. Harlan descended to the hospital level.

By this time, most of the victims had been taken to their staterooms; a small part jammed the hospital. Panic was evident in the eyes of the green-skinned passengers who had thus far escaped. The Terrestrials had risen to the occasion and were doing a good job of restoring order. Harlan overheard a paunchy businessman boasting of their accomplishment.

"When there's a real job to be done," he announced pompously, "takes an Earthman to do it, every time. Where'd these greenies be if we hadn't jumped in and taken hold? Even their captain is down with the plague. D'you know, they've got practically a whole crew of our men up there in the control room bringing this ship to a landing? Ten to one, they'll do a better job of it than the greenies themselves."

The hospital had been taken over by competent Earth women. Only one Venusian nurse remained on duty. But the green sentries were loudly in evidence. As Harlan approached, they seemed to be engaged in an altercation with one of the ship's officers, who shouted them down in frenzied Venusian.

THE OFFICER'S voice struck Harlan as familiar. Just as the guards succumbed to his threats—and admitted him to the forbidden precincts, Harlan recognized him. He was Kola Koom.

The Lieutenant looked dreadfully sick. His moisture-beaded skin had taken on the prevailing mustard hue,

and he staggered from weakness. But his determination triumphed over physical misery. He ran purposefully toward the far end of the main corridor.

Alarm seized Harlan. If Koom saw the Princess now—discovered the substitution—it would be all up with Cleo.

"Stop that man!" he shouted to the guards. "He's—" Abruptly realizing that they could not understand, Harlan called to a nurse: "That officer—just turning the corner—he's dangerous. It's gone to his head—the sickness. Tell the guards to bring him back."

The Earth girl looked startled. "I can't talk their lingo any more than you can," she protested.

Without thought of their weapons, Harlan thrust the guards out of his path and dashed after Kola Koom. The Venusians, after a moment of bewilderment, pursued him. Several nurses followed in their train.

In the passageway leading to the isolation ward, Kola Koom had cornered a volunteer nurse. "The keyth!" he demanded—and his lapse into the Venusian lisp betrayed the agitation under which he was laboring. "Give me keyth!"

"I haven't any keys," the Earth girl retorted, half frightened, half indignant. "You're sick. If you want medical attention—"

Kola Koom swung abruptly as Harlan, followed by guards and nurses bore down upon him. He bared his teeth. "The Earth Capitan!" he sneered. "Capitan Drake, I glad you here. You will witness final act of dying man. I have dru-hedra—I am doomed. But before I cash in checks, two thing I have to do. Number one thing is tell you how I despise all Earthmen. Number two thing—" his voice rose to a shriek "—you thall witneth!"

He staggered to the door of the

isolation ward, drawing his blaster. The guards cowered back, but it was not at them that he aimed the weapon. Before Harlan realized his purpose, he turned the devastating blast of pure energy on the door lock, which seemed to melt away like butter before its searing power.

Harlan had drawn his own pistol. As Koom plunged into the ward, he was a scant few steps behind. But when Harlan and the guards reached him, Koom was gazing down with gloating fury at the still form on the bed. His death-dealing weapon had done its work.

A WAVE of sickness swept over Harlan. The Venusian Princess had been beautiful in life. That beauty was tragically marred. The energy ray had raked diagonally across her face and breast, leaving a deep, blackened scar. As a green fluid oozed from the edges of the scar, he shuddered at how easily it might have been Cleo who lay there, her flawless body scorched to a lifeless husk. As from a distance, he heard the shrieks of nurses and the guttural exclamations of the guards.

"That," Koom snarled, his face contorted with hate, "is what all Earth spies deserve! It is fate I should enjoy give you, Capitan Drake, but you are reserve for more extreme punishment after vessel land. You learn what it mean to..." His voice trailed off. He turned to look again at the still figure on the bed. The green blood oozing from her blackened wound had struck him suddenly with its significance.

"This no Earth girl!" he exclaimed. "This girl—" He raised his pistol. "You do thith!" he shouted in baffled fury. "Where you take Earth girl?"

One of the guards seized Koom by the arm. That was a mistake. He received the full force of the Lieuten-

ant's blaster. The other turned and ran. "I kill you all!" Koom shouted as the screaming nurses jammed the door in their effort to escape. "You all Earth spies! I kill—" The Venusian Lieutenant collapsed to the floor as Harlan's blaster delivered its charge.

He glanced once at the lifeless Princess, then pushed his way through the group of frightened nurses. "I ask you to bear witness," he said sternly, "that this man was a homicidal maniac who had to be shot down for the safety of yourselves and the passengers. He'd already murdered the Princess and a guard."

THREE HOURS later, the Unocanabe made its landing. Considering that it was maneuvered by Earthmen unfamiliar with Venusian controls, the landing was a noteworthy job. An immediate quarantine was clapped on the vessel. Terrestrials, it was announced, would be allowed to leave within a few hours, but must pass through a series of fumigation and sterilizing cells. All Venusians who might die from the disease—and thus far few deaths had been reported—would be incinerated within the vessel. Survivors, if any, would eventually be permitted to land, after due processing in the fumigation chambers. The plague-ship itself would probably be destroyed.

Shortly after this announcement, Harlan encountered the swarthy green bus-boy who had instigated that momentous debacle of kitchen mischief. The boy dropped to his knees imploring, "Unga pewee! Unga pewee!"

Harlan winked broadly. "Unga pewee!" he repeated reassuringly. "You bet your life, kid, I won't tell." He touched a warning finger to his lips and grinned, whereat the boy broke into an answering grin and ducked away, no doubt vastly relieved

in mind.

Cleo and Harlan could have been among the first passengers to leave when the fumigation chambers had been set up and sealed to the exit ports, but Cleo obstinately refused to depart until her purpose had been accomplished.

"I assume you realize," Kenneth Oakes warned, "that you're skating on thin ice. It won't be long before everybody begins to recover from this attack of supposed dru-hedra. And what if word gets around that there's a live Princess La-ura Lu in her cabin and a dead one in the hospital?"

Cleo smiled sweetly. "Surely you don't imagine I'm going to report to Uncle that I came all this way only to fail here at the last? You may do as you like, but I'm waiting for the big chief of the Venusian Intelligence Service."

"He'll never show up," Oakes predicted. "You couldn't get a greenie to board this vessel if you offered him an aguna pehrin—which means just about the equivalent* of ten million dollars."

But he underestimated the fortitude of the Venusian Intelligence Service. Some four hours after the landing, a visitor for Princess La-ura Lu was announced.

Immediately, her cabin became a scene of bustling activity. None of this was apparent, however, when +825 made his impressive arrival.

THE VENUSIAN was tall—taller than the average of his race. This, and this alone, could be told of his appearance. He was accoutered in a baggy space garment which swathed him from head to foot. His breathing was accomplished through a branching tube connected with a tank resting across his shoulders. Even thus protected from the contamination of dru-hedra, it must have required a

high order of courage for him to board the vessel.

Looking very solemn, Captain Drake and Technician Oakes extended greetings to the distinguished visitor. Oakes explained that the Princess was close to death, being not only in extremis from the dread dru-hedra, but from blaster wounds inflicted by a maniac.

"Tell him," Harlan instructed, "to make his interview as brief as possible, because she is heroically drawing upon her last reserves of strength."

The reply, which came in sepulchral amplification from the headpiece, assured them that the Venusian deeply appreciated the courage and loyalty of the Princess La-ura Lu. For reasons which Earthmen could not be expected to comprehend, it had become necessary for him to risk his own life in order to receive her dying statement.

Ponderously, +825 trod to the doorway of the bedroom—but he stopped there, as if thus far and no farther would his courage sustain him. Through his viewplate, the Princess must have looked convincingly moribund. Cleo had managed to bleach her skin to the characteristic ghastly hue of a plague victim, and the seared edges of a blaster wound across one side of her face had been simulated with paint.

In a strained, faint voice, she spoke to her visitor. From behind the elephantine bulk of the space suit, Oakes whispered for Harlan's benefit, "She's putting him on the defensive. Unable to see his face, she demands identification—passwords. Plus-minus is falling over himself to convince her that he's who he is."

As if satisfied, the girl called out something in a peremptory voice. Oakes grinned. "She says for us to scram. What she has to say is for his ears alone."

THEY WAITED outside the cabin door until, staggering under the weight of his space-suit—or perhaps under the important information he carried—the Venusian emerged. The two Earthmen accompanied him to the exit. Before leaving, he informed them, in accents choked with emotion, that the Princess La-ura Lu had performed a service beyond understanding, which would be reflected in the peaceful relations of the two worlds for generations to come. Her courage and self-sacrifice would go down as unparalleled in the annals of Venusian history.

"Perhaps," Kenneth remarked philosophically, after translating this tribute, "the real Princess didn't lose her life in vain."

Cleo gave them a hasty resume of the interview. "I became very indignant when I learned of the false radiogram which had reached him in the Princess' name. My wording had evidently been distorted by some traitor or spy, with intent to plunge Venus into a losing war with Earth. He's promised to institute a searching investigation. I described the Lunar fortifications in terms which would have gladdened Uncle's heart. Plus-minus was deeply impressed. He decided on the spot to recommend that Venus lose no time in signing the ninety-nine year treaty. He'll tell the Planetary council that the terms are most reasonable, in view of Earth's commanding power. And now, if you boys will give me a little privacy, I'm going to squirm out of this sickening green envelope."

The decision was reached to leave the Princess' body in the hospital. "If the question comes up, Plus-minus will assume she was taken there after he left," Oakes reasoned. "Discrepancies in accounts of the guards and nurses will be laid to the general confusion."

In expectation of being challenged at the embarkation gate, a fictitious name for Cleo had been concocted, and a fairly plausible story to account for its not being listed on the passenger rolls. But the exits were still in charge of Terrestrial volunteer workers, and no questions were asked.

THAT EVENING, the trio—Cleo Spahr, Captain Harlan Drake, and Kenneth Oakes—regaled the Earth consul-general, Blaine Phillips, with the highlights of their story.

"Sounds fantastic," Phillips declared. "And while you young folks were having your fun, maybe you think I haven't been sweating it out. Kept my staff busy decoding messages from John Angstrom. He really suffered, young lady!"

"Poor Uncle!" Cleo exclaimed compassionately.

"He's on the point of impeaching himself and resigning as Earth's defense commissioner on account of the mess he figures he made of things. He's convinced that Miss Spahr must be dead—or facing hideous torture. Also holds himself responsible for the unpardonable error of admitting a spy to the Lunar fortifications. It'll jar him out of a year's growth when I report that you're on your way home after succeeding beyond his wildest hope."

"How the devil did they let the real La-ura Lu slip through their hands?" demanded Harlan.

"He takes the blame for that, too. Apparently this girl was a pretty slick chicken. They were keeping her under temporary detention in her apartment at his residence, with four men on guard—alternate shifts. That's where he made his mistake. They should have been women. La-ura Lu staged a little party, slipped the guards what our ancestors used to call a Mickey Finn—some potent Venusian drug—

and that was that. She got in touch with her own consulate and they shipped her to the Moon wrapped in a repair part. Now, about getting you home—"

"I'd like to have you use your influence to get me transferred to an Earth vessel," interrupted Oakes.

"That shouldn't be difficult. The North Star blasts off tomorrow..."

Harlan listened only with a fragment of his mind. He was thinking how wonderfully sweet Cleo looked, her true personality no longer buried under an alien skin and alien mannerisms. Almost, he had lost belief in her reality. But here she was, the embodiment of all he held desirable. Until now, there had been only a few brief kisses—snatched in those last hours aboard the liner. He reddened, suddenly aware that the Earth Consul was speaking to him.

"I said," repeated Phillips, "that I trusted you wouldn't mind."

"Mind what?"

"Waiting over until the next Earth liner leaves, in thirty days. This South American importer and his wife were under obligations to me and gladly gave up their reservation on tomorrow's vessel for Cleo; but there isn't another vacancy."

Harlan's face clouded. He had been looking forward to that return voyage on the same vessel with Cleo.

She answered before he could frame a reply: "But—that's dreadful! Did you say the reservation was for the importer—and his wife?"

"True; but..." the Consul coughed with embarrassment, "unfortunately, it's a single cabin."

"If I'm not mistaken..." Cleo's face was flushed... "you're empowered to perform marriage ceremonies."

"Certainly."

"Then..." her eyes were averted, but her hand sought Harlan Drake's "...what are we waiting for?"



By William P. McGivern

"PERCIVAL, *nothing* is more important than fox-hunting with the van Rensalers."

Percival Pettibone knew then that the argument was over. When his wife used that particular tone it was an indication that logic and reason were of no avail. His wife used that tone quite a lot, Percival reflected moodily, glancing at her as she sat in her favorite chair lazily turning the pages of a fashion magazine.

"I know you're awfully keen on it, Cynthia," he said. "I suppose we can pinch a bit here and there and make out all right."

A line of annoyance tightened about his wife's lips. "I do wish you could cooperate with me for once without reminding me immediately

what a hardship it will wreak on you."

"Dear, I meant nothing of the sort. But with doing over the garden and your car this season, I am a little strapped. This fox-hunting is an extra I hadn't counted on."

"You talk as if you expect to bring your own horse. The van Rensalers supply those, you know."

"Yes, of course. But there are still riding clothes for both of us, and the trip to their place, and—"

Cynthia put her magazine down with a gesture that silenced her husband in mid-sentence. "I really don't wish to hear any more about it, Percival. It's enough, I should think, that I don't have adequate clothes, or sufficient servants, without your at-

SOME WOLVES

CAN'T KILL!

To Cynthia, Percy was no more than a sheep. But when it came to fox hunting, he was literally a wolf!



Above the sound of breaking timbers, Cynthia's scream rose to horrible heights

tempting to destroy our one chance to get to know the best people in the county. The van Rensalers have invited us fox-hunting next week-end and we are going. That's all there is to it."

"Yes, my dear," Percy said, resignedly.

His wife returned to her magazine, and Percy, studying her covertly over the edge of his paper, wondered why he never found the courage to stick to his guns against her. She was a lovely thing to look at, of course; but that wasn't it. Not any more. Once Percy had been thrilled by her remote glacial beauty, but now it meant less to him than the chromium fixtures in the bathroom. Cynthia was a blonde and shining woman, and her body was slender and perfectly conditioned; but Percy knew her to be an empty temple.

She put her magazine aside and rose gracefully. "This bickering about our poverty has given me a headache. I'm going upstairs to rest. Please don't disturb me when you come to bed."

"I may take a walk," Percy said. "I don't feel tired."

"Very well. I'll say goodnight then."

When she had retired to the upper floor of their spacious suburban home, Percy wandered disconsolately about the living room, his thoughts in a lackadaisical turmoil. This fox-hunting was ridiculous! He was strained to the limits as it was to keep this house going, to provide the sort of background that Cynthia considered essential to her happiness. He wished he could chuck it all and lie on a beach the rest of his life; but of course he couldn't. Somehow he'd raise the money to include fox-hunting in their budget.

jacket and went onto the porch. It was a cool peaceful night, ideal for a walk. He set off down the sidewalk that wound circuitously toward the village, and gradually a semblance of peace returned to his soul. Outside under a dark sky Percy always felt more secure, more at home. Something about nighttime's velvety secretness attracted him strongly. The night was gentle and protective, unlike the bright and bitter day where people could watch your every move and sit in judgment on your slightest act.

At the village Percy turned into a small cheerful tavern for a glass of beer. He felt guilty about spending the money, since he had been denying himself any personal extravagances for years; but tonight seemed different in some way he couldn't analyze and a glass of beer seemed to be called for.

There were four or five men sitting along the bar, and a few couples in the dark wooden booths. The bar was lined with knotty pine and there were a brace of ancient rifles hanging on one wall and a stuffed deer head above the bar.

Percy studied the noble antlers of the deer as he sipped his beer, and his thoughts ran idly but swiftly into speculations about the life that graceful animal must have lived. He saw it clearly in the eye of his mind, racing like the wind through cold black forests and halting suddenly—one with the stillness and the night. That must have been fun, Percy thought rather wistfully. To drink at rippling streams, to browse in dry underbrush, to lie still and warm in the depths of a cave and watch wind and rain lashing the ground outside—what pleasure that must be!

Percy turned back to his own problems rather reluctantly. He was the assistant art director of a large advertising agency and despised his job;

AFTER a few pointless turns about the room Percy slipped into a

but there was pretty good money in it and that was why Cynthia insisted he stick at it. But the money wasn't enough for Cynthia's tastes. He decided he could cut out lunch altogether and stop buying art folders. That would save a few dollars. But what else? He didn't buy books or paintings anymore and spent very little on clothes. There were his oil paints. They didn't cost much, it was true, but even those few dollars would have to be saved.

Percy winced inwardly at the idea of giving up his painting. It was all he enjoyed doing, all he'd ever wanted to do. When he and Cynthia had been married she had been pleased by his painting. She regarded it as a somewhat aristocratic achievement. But she didn't understand or like his work, and when she realized there was no money in it, she had seen to it that he spent his time at more commercial activities. Percy's paintings didn't make too much sense to most people and sometimes they made little sense to Percy himself; but two critics of integrity and judgment had spent a long time with his canvases and both had told him to go on with his work. Percy wasn't a realist or an impressionist; in fact he didn't belong to any recognized school. He painted his subjects as they *should* be, and not as they were. Thus an apple might come out as a strong vigorous series of rectangles, somehow sustaining and enjoyable, while a chair might be a weird arrangement of curves into which the observer felt himself sinking endlessly. Percy's only drawing of Cynthia was very strange. It was a solid black ball, heavy, oppressive, immovable.

But now Percy had little time for his own work. His days were spent designing collar ads that showed beaming young men with big chests proudly wearing Remarko shirts. Or

drawing toothy children lapping up Refresho soups. Sometimes he got in a week-end of painting when Cynthia was off visiting a college friend. But now he'd have to give that up too. The few dollars he spent on paints and brushes would go for a stock for Cynthia. Probably one made of yellow silk with figures of tiny black horses sewn onto it.

"Relax, my friend, nothing is that serious."

PERCY turned sharply, guiltily at these words, and met the sardonic eyes of a young man who had taken the stool on his right. The young man was of thin but muscular build, with coarse black hair and ruddy cheeks. He wore a corduroy jacket, a woolen shirt and tweed trousers. There was the look of the open fields about him, the flavor of the country sportsman. But his eyes were odd. They were wild, reckless, mocking: the eyes of a devil or a saint.

"I beg your pardon?" Percy said.

"I've been watching you for the last few minutes," the young man said. He said this calmly, casually, as if staring at strangers was the most normal thing in the world. "You seem awfully anxious about something. Not very happy, are you?"

"Well—no," Percy said. Something about the young man compelled honesty.

"Of course you're not. So few of us are that it's hardly remarkable, I suppose. I noticed you before looking at the stag's head above the bar. Then you seemed rather wistful. What is it? Do you envy the stag his freedom?"

"Of course not!" Percy said, flustered. "Anyway, he's not very free is he?"

"At the moment, no," the young man said, casting an amused glance

at the head above the bar. "However his life was free and exciting until he met a certain hunter. I got the impression you were speculating on the delights of freedom while staring at his unfortunate head. Isn't that true?"

"Well, yes, it is," Percy admitted. There was just no point in lying to this young man. Percy knew that intuitively.

"What sort of freedom did you have in mind?"

"What sort? Why there's only one sort, isn't there?"

The young man chuckled. "There are many varieties of freedom. Freedom to do nothing; freedom to do anything. Would you like to be free to follow a stag through a dark and dripping forest? Or would you like to be free to lie on a beach and do nothing—except perhaps, on brilliant days, paint a bit?"

"How did you know I liked to paint?" Percy said, almost stuttering in his excitement. "And that about following a stag? How did you know I've dreamed about things like that?"

The young man shrugged modestly. "Just good guesses," he said, but his eyes mocked the words. His eyes told Percy there was nothing accidental about his information.

"Who are you?" Percy asked.

"My name is Black," the young man answered. "That doesn't tell you who I am, of course, although I am no one of importance. What I mean is that names are labels that do not identify their wearers. A man named Smith is a murderer! The Smith part of him doesn't tell us that, does it?"

"Well, no—no, it doesn't," Percy said weakly.

The lean young man waved to the bartender. "Two whiskies, please."

"But I don't drink whisky!"

"Nonsense," Mr. Black said, with a wicked smile.

THE TWO shot glasses were placed before them and filled with whisky. Percy studied his dubiously. Mr. Black took a small, lacquered box from his pocket and from it removed two tiny pills. He dropped one of the pills into his glass, and then grinned at Percy as he held the other pill poised above Percy's glass.

"Well? Would you like to try a rather interesting prescription of mine?"

"W-what is it?"

"Nothing very new or important," Mr. Black said with a modest shrug. "However you may enjoy it. Who knows? It might even help to acquire that freedom you are so eagerly hoping for."

"I'll try it," Percy said boldly. He felt suddenly reckless, heedless of consequence. There was a quality about this young man that inspired rebellion.

"Excellent!" Mr. Black dropped the pill into Percy's glass where it fizzed briefly and disappeared. "Now we shall drink," he said, raising his glass. "To your dreams!" he said, and tossed down his liquor.

"To my dreams!" Percy repeated slowly; and then drank his own drink. The pill, whatever it was, had no taste or odor. The whisky was smooth, potent and warming; the pill hadn't affected it in any manner that Percy could detect.

Percy savored the exciting warmth that was flooding through his arms and legs, travelling slowly and sinuously from the hot center in his stomach. He put down his glass reluctantly and turned to the young man.

"That tasted fine," he said. "I think—"

Percy stopped abruptly, in mid-sentence. He realized with a frightening start that he was addressing empty air. The young man was gone. Percy glanced along the bar, thinking

that the young man might have drifted to another stool. But he wasn't anywhere in sight. Maybe he's gone to the men's room, Percy thought. Yes, that undoubtedly was it. . . .

Percy waited twenty minutes but the young man didn't return. Finally, bewildered and uneasy, he signalled the bartender.

"Do you remember that young chap who was sitting next to me?" he asked.

The bartender was a graying man, with an intelligent face and a professional air of deference.

"I can't say that I do, sir," he said. "I haven't noticed anyone sitting beside you, sir."

"You haven't? Well, this is silly. You served us two whiskies a while back."

"Two whiskies? I'm sorry, sir, but I only served *one* whisky."

"Well, take a look at his glass then," Percy said. "How did *that* get there?"

"What glass, sir?"

Percy glanced at the section of the bar beside him and saw that it was clean and empty. There was no glass within twenty feet of him except his own.

"I couldn't have imagined all this," Percy murmured to himself. "I simply *couldn't*. There *was* a young man, a man named Black, and he put a pill of some kind in my drink."

"I beg your pardon, sir?"

"Oh, nothing at all," Percy said. The bartender was regarding him with a worried frown he noticed. This wouldn't do at all. The man must think he was drunk. "Ha, ha," Percy laughed, with an impressive note of insincerity in his voice. "I was just trying a little experiment on you."

"Experiment, sir?"

"Yes, testing the power of suggestion, you know." Percy babbled on, desperately trying to convince the

bartender that all was well. "You see, most people are very susceptible to suggestion. If you say to them, as I did to you, 'Did you see that chap I was with?', they'll answer, 'Yes, of course.' Do you see?"

The bartender pursed his lips, regarded Percy steadily. "But there was no young man," he said.

"Quite, quite," Percy said, with a hearty laugh. "No young man at all."

"I see. It was a bit of a joke, eh?"

"That's right, a bit of a joke."

"Ha, ha," the bartender laughed politely. He gave Percy one frozen grin, and then walked off with his shoulders set at a stiff, unamused angle.

PERCY left some change on the bar and hurried out into the night. It was nearly eleven o'clock, he noticed with dismay. Cynthia would be worrying about him by now. And when he made her worry she took it out on him somehow.

Percy left the village and hurried through the darkened streets toward his home. Overhead a pale moon was obscured by drifting clouds. The light that filtered through the waving tree branches was dim and filmy.

Percy was conscious of the need for speed. He buttoned his coat, pulled his hat down tighter, and began to run through the night. His breath came quickly, and he could hear the pounding of his heart, synchronized with the pounding of his feet on the sidewalk.

Everything else was still and quiet. There was a whisper of wind in the trees, and the masses of clouds moved slowly to hide the face of the moon, but all else was as silent as the grave.

Percy realized that he had never run so fast in all his life. He was literally hurtling along like an express train, and he seemed to be quite close to the ground. He could see the cracks

in the sidewalk flicking back out of sight between his legs, and the shrubbery at his side, which now seemed very high, was falling behind him with a rush.

Soon he was at the block he lived in, and he could see his house ahead, dark and silent. There was a gate at the front of the house, and Percy soared over it with an effortless bound. It was a delightful sensation, free and exhilarating, and Percy wondered with a pang of concern from whence all this energy was stemming. Reaching his porch, he trotted up the steps and began fumbling for his keys.

But something was radically wrong!

Percy couldn't get his hands into his pockets. He couldn't find the proper openings, and his hands—oddly inept and fumbling now—seemed to be *scratching* unavailingly at the sides of his coat.

It was all very disturbing, and Percy decided guiltily that his present confusion must be a result of the drinking he had done. He became aware that he was staring at the brass letter drop in the door, and oddly enough, the letter drop was on a direct level with his eyes. That simply couldn't be, Percy thought, unless—and this was foolish—unless he were down on all fours.

He glanced down involuntarily, and the breath suddenly left his lungs like air from a bursting balloon.

Percy was on all fours!

HE WAS on all fours and he had paws instead of hands and they were covered with thick grayish fur. Percy spun about in a circle, his mind reeling with fright, trying to catch another glimpse of what he had apparently turned into; but all he saw was a waving ropy tail that was affixed in some manner to his back.

"My God!" Percy cried.

No words sounded in the still night; instead Percy heard a shrill keening howl that transformed his blood into rivulets of ice. He let out a cry of terror, and again he heard the unearthly howl ringing in his ears.

Suddenly he realized that *he* was making the noise.

A light flashed on above him—from Cynthia's room. The window opened with an angry bang.

"Get out of here, you filthy cur!" It was Cynthia's voice, rasping and angry.

Percy glanced up and saw his wife framed in light, staring down at him with outraged indignation.

"Dear, I can explain everything," Percy said, forgetting that he couldn't speak anymore. He winced and ran about in confusion as his series of apologetic barks sounded in the silence.

"Scat, get away, get out of here!" Cynthia cried.

Sighing, Percy trotted across the lawn and slid into the shelter of the bushes at the corner of his lot. He turned about a few times, then settled down and watched his wife. His eyes were extremely sharp, he realized. He could see the anger in her face, the tight lines about her mouth, the wrinkles at the corners of her eyes. She was staring in his general direction, but couldn't see him, he knew. Finally, after a few moments, she closed the window; the light disappeared and something like peace again settled over the neighborhood.

Percy considered his position glumly. Obviously something quite catastrophic had happened to him: he had been turned into some sort of dog or wolf.

It must have been the doings of the weird young man he had met at the bar. But he *hadn't* met any

young man at the bar. That whole incident was a hallucination if the bartender were to be believed. Percy shook his head worriedly. What was a man—or a dog—to believe?

Percy heard a deep challenging sound off to his left. He stiffened instantly, and felt the hairs rising on the back of his neck. A loud growl came from his throat.

He saw a huge shape emerge from the shadows of his house and move toward him with stiff menacing steps.

This was Killer, the next-door-neighbor's huge and vicious airedale. Percy retreated deeper into the bushes, some ancient caution making him move stealthily, silently.

If there was one object on earth which Percy hated with his entire soul it was this dog, Killer. Killer was owned by a big red-necked man who took a savage delight in his dog's viciousness. Killer had chewed up all the dogs in the area and had frightened most of the children to death. Several times he had chased Percy down the block, and only a frantic lunge behind the gate to his property had saved Percy from losing a mouthful of his trousers. He had complained about it to the dog's owner—Tom Benton—and had been laughed at for his trouble. Once Killer had chased him down the block and Tom Benton had stood on his porch roaring with delight at the spectacle.

Now Killer was trotting toward him, and Percy could understand his low, savage growls.

They said: "I belong here, you don't. Whoever you are, I'm going to chase you away."

"I belong here more than you do," Percy said. "You're on my property right now, as a matter of fact."

Percy spoke with indignation, for he knew himself to be in the right; and his meaning was translated into

a series of ominous growls.

KILLER came to a slow halt, and every muscle in his massive frame was quivering with anticipation. He barked once, softly; and it was an invitation to battle.

Percy felt very little fear of Tom Benton's dog, and that struck him as odd. He got swiftly to his feet and trotted out of the bushes; and Killer lunged at him with the speed of a lightning bolt.

But Percy, to his own surprise and delight, moved a great deal faster. He whirled away from Killer's rush and slashed at his shoulder as the airedale skidded impotently past him. His long curved fangs tore deeply into Killer's side, and he struck twice more before the other dog could turn again to the fight.

Killer backed away cautiously, and Percy saw with pride that he stood at least three inches taller at the shoulder than the airedale, and outweighed him by some thirty pounds.

"Come on and fight," he said. "You've had a fine time chasing the tame puppies who live on the block. Now try it with someone your size."

He lunged at Killer, but the once-vicious dog wheeled in fright and scampered across the lawn toward his own house. The last Percy saw of him was his stubby tail disappearing over the fence.

Percy chuckled to himself and returned to the comparative comfort of the shrubbery. That encounter had done him a world of good, he realized. For years he had wanted to get even with Killer, and now that score was paid in full.

He put his long jaws between his paws and settled down comfortably. He didn't know what to do with himself, so he rested quietly, because some instinct was warning him that he might need all his strength in the

future.

Finally he fell asleep. . . .

He woke with a start to see the first gray light of dawn breaking behind his house. With a start he scrambled to all fours and peered about; everything was deathly quiet and still. Very well! Confidently he started forward, intending to explore a bit; but he plunged awkwardly to the ground, his face striking the cold damp earth with painful force.

Groggily, he sat up; and as he did he realized that he was once again wearing his human form. He stared dumbfoundedly at his arms and legs, studying them as if they were weird appendages he had never seen before.

Well, this was queer, he thought! One minute a wolf, the next a human being. It was enough to make a man neurotic.

Puzzled and apprehensive, Percy got to his feet and crossed the lawn to his house. He let himself in stealthily and tip-toed up to his room. Luckily, he didn't wake Cynthia. He crawled into his bed, wondering bleakly what tomorrow would bring. This was too painful a thought to contemplate, and he was desperately grateful when sleep finally came. . . .

AT BREAKFAST the next morning Percy was heavy-lidded and exhausted. Cynthia sat across the dining table from him, an expression of grim disapproval on her face.

"You expect me to believe you *walked* until three o'clock this morning? Come, I should think you could invent a more plausible excuse than that."

"But it's the truth, dear. I—I was thinking and I forgot all about the time."

"And what were you thinking about that caused you to drift about for six hours like a zombie?"

Percy had an inspiration. "I was

thinking how pleasant it will be at the van Rensalers. I know you will look just stunning in riding clothes, and I was thinking that maybe I might pick them up for you today."

Cynthia, as is the case with most vain women, was not too discerning. Flattery never seemed anything but the barest truth to her and she seldom examined its source or motivation. She smiled at Percy, forgiving him a bit.

"That was sweet of you," she said. "Most women would be worried if their husbands stayed out all night. But I wasn't. Not really."

"No? Why not?"

Cynthia laughed musically. "I know you too well. You're no wolf, my dear."

Percy saw Tom Benton standing on his porch as he left for work.

"Hello there, how's that puppy of yours?" he called cheerfully.

Tom Benton came down his porch steps shaking his head. "Something got Killer last night," he said, with awe in his voice. "Poor devil's all cut up. Must have been a puma or something."

Percy looked full into Tom Benton's cruel piggyish eyes and laughed aloud.

"The nearest pumas are eight hundred miles away," he said. "You'd better keep your dog on a leash after this. It was probably a pomeranian that got after him."

With another cheerful laugh he strolled off to catch his train.

CHAPTER II

THE VAN RENSALEERS lived in a stately home surrounded by many acres of rolling wooded land. Everything that met the eye on their estate was of the finest quality; a testament to the inspired thievery of old Nelson van Rensaler, the founder of the clan, who had made the money to support

the six following generations by selling rotgut liquor to the Indians and stealing land from ignorant immigrants.

The current head of the clan was young Tony van Rensaler, a lissom alcoholic who was married to a showy blonde whose only interesting characteristic was a penchant for knickknacks and jewelry that belonged to someone else. Cheryl van Rensaler was also a flagrant dipsomaniac, but her indiscretions had been carefully hushed up through the potent power of the van Rensaler name and money.

Percy and Cynthia drove up to the entrance of their home on a spectacular autumn morning. The trees were a riot of colors, ranging from pale gold to the deepest purple. Above, a lambent sun poured a warm benediction over the countryside. It shone brightly on the buttons of the footmen and gilded the silver hair of the butler as they came forward to help Percy and Cynthia from their car and welcome them to Shady Manor, the name of the van Rensaler country seat.

Inside the vast foyer Tony van Rensaler was waiting to greet them. He was a thin young man with lank blond hair and bloodshot eyes. With him was a huge heavy-shouldered man with bright confident eyes and square handsome features. His name was Dwight Dinsmore.

It was Dinsmore who grasped Percy's hand in a bone-crushing grip and shook his arm until Percy heard his shoulder joint creaking a protest. Dwight Dinsmore was the hearty muscular outdoorsy type—a type Percy found very depressing.

But Cynthia brightened noticeably as he took her hand. "I've heard of you, I believe. You're the famous gentleman jockey and hunter, aren't you?"

Dwight Dinsmore smiled modestly.

"It's good of you to put it that way. Do you hunt?"

Tony van Rensaler glanced at Percy. "Care for a drink, old man? I've got a foul head and need a few jolts to make it behave."

"I—I don't think so," Percy said.

"Well, I'll join you all later."

"I've never really hunted," Cynthia was saying to Dwight Dinsmore. She looked as if she were ready to crawl into his pocket, Percy thought.

"You'll get your baptism tomorrow morning then," Dwight said, with relish. "There's a fox in this country that I'm just aching to run down."

"Is he vicious?" Percy asked with obvious innocence.

Dwight Dinsmore glanced at him with a frown. "No, of course not. But it's sport, don't you see? To chase one of those little red devils for miles and miles, and then run him into the ground and watch the hounds get him—" Dwight Dinsmore let out his breath happily. "Brother, that's a thrill."

"I can imagine," Percy murmured.

"Would you like to look over the horses now?" Dwight said eagerly. He was speaking only to Cynthia, Percy knew.

"I'd be delighted. Percy, see about our things, will you? I'll be back in an hour or so."

"Yes, of course," Percy said. He was glad to get away from Dinsmore, the bloody savage; and he didn't care very much what Cynthia did.

They hurried off, Dinsmore holding Cynthia's arm protectively.

THE FOOTMAN took Percy's and Cynthia's things upstairs. Percy changed into a tweed jacket and went back downstairs. He found a huge library on the first floor and slipped into its cloistered coolness with a feeling of gratitude. He was sure that here

in the peaceful society of books he would be safe from Dinsmore and his host.

But he didn't have the place to himself, he noticed with a pang of disappointment. There was a girl sitting by the window reading. She glanced up at him and Percy noted there seemed to be a touch of disappointment in *her* face.

"You probably lost your way," she said. "The bar is down the hall to the right."

"I wasn't looking for the bar," Percy said.

"No? Perhaps you wanted the game room or the swimming pool."

"As a matter of fact I wanted to read a book," Percy said. He was slightly piqued at the girl's assumption that he was either after games or liquor.

"Well, this *is* a surprise," the girl said, putting down her book. She was a plain looking girl with soft brown hair and gentle eyes.

"The people here don't care much for books, is that it?" Percy said.

"That's quite an understatement." The girl smiled. "My name is Elma Wilson. Forgive me for the way I talked to you."

"Certainly. I'm Percy Pettibone. I won't disturb you by reading here, will I?"

"No, of course not."

"Thank you." Percy went to the shelves, selected a volume on medieval architecture, which was once one of his hobbies, and settled down in a chair opposite the girl. They read in silence for a few moments, and then the girl said: "Are you down for the hunting tomorrow?"

"Yes."

"Do you like fox-hunting?"

"I've never tried it, actually. But I'm sure I won't. It seems a foolish and vicious business."

"Well, why are you going then?"

"My wife is very keen on it," Percy said.

"Oh, your wife." The girl put a lot into the words. "I hate it, but I'm a poor relation so my opinion doesn't matter much."

"That's too bad."

"Oh, I don't mind. Being a poor relation, that is."

"Well, that's not what I meant. I meant it's too bad your opinion doesn't matter."

"You don't seem like the others who come down here," the girl said, regarding him with a curious expression.

"Well, frankly, you don't seem like the rest of the people here either," Percy said. He had a warm and friendly feeling toward this girl. He felt he could talk to her with his defenses down. She wouldn't laugh at him, or mock him for being sincere.

"That's a very nice thing to know," she said, and smiled.

THEY BOTH put their books aside after that and talked for the next hour or so. Percy hadn't enjoyed himself so much in years. Elma Wilson was informed and intelligent. She didn't chatter about clothes or gossip about friends. They talked about literature, politics and art. They had a fine time.

It came to an end when the door opened and Dwight Dinsmore and Cynthia entered. They carried drinks and were laughing wildly about something or other. The peace of the library fled instantly.

"Well, well, I told your wife we'd find you in here," Dwight Dinsmore said. His normal tone was a cross between a school yell and the shout of a First Sergeant. "Yes sir, you seemed the bookish type to me. I can spot people right off."

"Percy, introduce us to your friend," Cynthia said, regarding Elma Wilson with poorly disguised contempt.

"Are you also the bookish type, my dear?"

"Possibly," Elma said, smiling.

"What type are you?"

"Well, thank heavens I'm not the bookish type."

"I wouldn't have suspected that you were."

"What do you get out of reading books all the time?" Cynthia said.

"Now that's a sensible question," Dwight Dinsmore said. "What the devil do you get out of books?"

"Perhaps if you tried one—or had a kind friend read one to you—you might find out," Elma said, standing. She smiled at Percy. "It's very pleasant talking with you. We'll see each other around, I'm sure."

When she had gone, Cynthia glared suspiciously at Percy. "I don't like that girl, you know."

"Wet blanket," Dwight Dinsmore said with an emphatic shake of his head.

Percy felt strangely angry. "She's a charming, civilized person," he said heatedly. "How did you expect her to react after treating her as an idiot simply because she's interested in books?"

"Percy is always defending underdogs," Cynthia said, smiling at Dinsmore. "Likes attract, I suppose."

"I've got no use for underdogs," Dinsmore said heartily. "Most of them are whining cowards. I like red-blooded men. Now you take hunting—that shows a man up in his true colors. You'll see tomorrow, Pettibone."

Percy could only nod glumly.

That night there was a large dinner at which Percy met Mrs. van Rensaler and the other guests. Everyone was quite drunk by nine o'clock, and the great house resounded with the squeals of women being chased from room to room, and occasional bickerings that broke out among the men. He didn't see Elma Wilson about, nor did he

see much of Cynthia. She was off in the garden somewhere with Dinsmore, he knew. They were drifting toward an affair, but Percy hardly cared. He wandered around until ten o'clock, feeling lonely and bored; and then he slipped upstairs to his room.

Lying in bed and staring out the open window at the dark moonless sky, he thought about tomorrow. He wondered almost nostalgically if he would ever again turn into a wolf. That had been good fun. Then he rebuked himself sharply. That simply hadn't happened. It had been his imagination, or the unaccustomed drink he'd taken. Still—what about Benton's dog? *Something* had chewed him up. Percy pulled the covers up to his chin uneasily, and finally drifted into a troubled sleep. He dreamed that Dinsmore was a great ugly bulldog and that he was a wolf who chased him all over the place.

CHAPTER III

THE NEXT morning Percy woke when the first weak rays of the sun entered the room. It was five o'clock, and Cynthia, he saw, was still sleeping soundly. He got out of bed quietly, and after shaving and showering, dressed and tip-toed from the room. He went downstairs and wandered outside. The day would be a beautiful one, he saw. Everywhere was the mark of Nature's glory—in the flowers, the trees, the clean cool air, the sparkling green grass.

Percy wandered through gardens to the rear of the house and stood looking gloomily at the distant stables. He felt tired and depressed; all his energies were gone. Today he would be expected to climb onto a great rearing horse and go galloping about the countryside in pursuit of a half-tame fox. That was the way the people here repaid Nature for the glories she sur-

rounded them with—by wanton killings.

He remembered that Elma Wilson hadn't liked the prospects of fox-hunting either. Percy wished he could chuck the hunting and spend the day with her, walking through the woods perhaps, or reading beside a soft-voiced stream. Why couldn't he? he wondered dispiritedly. Where was his courage, his convictions?

There was no answer to those questions. Percy had deferred to his wife so long that there was no spark of rebellion in his breast.

Percy strolled across the expansive grounds behind the house, passing greenhouses and kennels until he came to the stables. They were freshly painted in white with green trim on the huge double doors. The doors were open so Percy entered cautiously and peered about, entranced by the huge size of the place and by the horses which stood with their heads emerging from their stalls and staring at him nervously. One or two of them neighed shrilly and several began kicking the backs of the stalls and tossing their great heads in excitement.

"Whoa!" Percy muttered uneasily. "Take it easy, boys."

Suddenly a stall gate swung open and a horse plunged out into the wide corridor that ran between the stalls. Percy bleated in fear and ran—away from the open door at his back. This was not a wise maneuver since it put him on a straight-away with the horse charging at his heels. He heard the frightening drumming of the horses' hooves at his back, heard them coming closer, with each instant, and in his mind he saw himself trampled into the sawdust beneath those churning iron-studded feet.

Then, from somewhere, he found a new speed in his legs; he raced over the ground like a thunderbolt. Ahead loomed the doors at the far end of

the stables; and they were closed. Percy skidded to a stop before them, and wheeled about in panic; but as he whirled he caught sight of something that caused his heart to hammer with excitement and fear.

Percy saw a tail!

Yes, there was no doubt about it, he realized, spinning about in a circle. He had a tail, and he was down on all fours again. The conclusion was inescapable; he had turned into a wolf.

THERE were compensations for every circumstance, Percy thought with impressive detachment. Now the charging horse was no longer a problem. The great animal had reared in fright at the sight of the wolf, and while he was still pawing the air with his hooves, Percy shot between his legs and trotted out of the stable. He circled the yard once, wondering aimlessly what to do, and then he became aware of a great commotion in the kennels. The dogs were tearing about madly and giving tongue with every ounce of lung power they owned. Percy realized intuitively that he was the source of their excitement. Obviously they had got his scent and knew him to be something alien and strange. Their racial memories were coming awake at the presence of an ancient and dreaded enemy.

Well, that wouldn't do at all, Percy realized. There was no course left to him but the one of discretion, so he trotted away from the van Rensalers and headed for the welcoming fastness of the woods he could see in the distance. He covered the meadows and fields at full speed, and his long lithe form was only a gray blur streaking through the tall grass. Once in the comforting gloom of the woods he slowed down to a jogging, ground-devouring trot. He was enjoying himself immensely, he decided. It was grand to feel strong and resourceful.

He drank from a flowing stream and settled in a thicket about half a mile away. His eyes were wonderfully sharp. He watched a finch building a nest, and he could have counted each twig and blade that was used in the job. He watched two ants fighting on a leaf a hundred feet in the air, and he could tell the moment one of the adversaries landed a mortal blow. His ears were incredibly sharp, too. He heard worms crawling under the ground, and the steady beat of a bird's wings high in the air, and the billion other significant noises of the forest.

The sun climbed slowly into the sky, and Percy rested, confused and uncertain about what had happened to him, but withal, oddly at peace....

Another sound drifted through the air, and Percy's long ears straightened sharply. It was an ominous chilling sound, and it was coming steadily closer. He recognized it immediately as the baying of hounds on a scent and he knew it meant danger.

Scrambling to his feet he trotted from the protective thicket and moved about in circles, testing the wind with his nose, and drawing a fix on the hounds with his sensitive ears. These wonderful instruments allowed him to plot the position and course of the hound-pack with the certitude of a navigator equipped with quadrant and compass.

The hounds were setting out from the van Rensaler estate now, followed by a troop of men and women on horseback. They weren't coming directly toward him, he knew; they were setting a course that would take them past him by at least half a mile. Encouraged, Percy trotted swiftly back to the edge of the forest where he had a view of the fields and meadows surrounding the van Rensaler home. He paused in the concealment of a heavy bush, his body immobile as a figure cut from wood, and watched the pack

of dogs and horses tearing across the countryside. There were sixteen dogs, all of them lean spotted setters, and behind them came a dozen horsemen and horsewomen. Percy saw that Dwight Dinsmore was leading the group. He was riding recklessly, defiantly, in the tradition of a great horseman, and his crop rose and fell on the flanks of his horse with the regularity of a metronome.

Percy wished fervently that he would fall and break his neck. But that didn't seem likely. Dinsmore was too good for that. Suddenly he caught another scent in the wind. He swung his head about in that direction and saw a small brown fox tearing along about a mile ahead of the hounds. The fox was heading for the woods and seemed likely to enter them about a mile from where Percy was crouching at the moment. The fox wasn't in the best of situations, Percy realized. The hounds were gaining on him swiftly, and now that they had him in sight it would be difficult for the fox to lose them.

Percy's anger at Dinsmore and this whole brutal business grew swiftly. He knew there was little he could do, but at least he might provide some moral support for the harried fox.

TURNING swiftly, he dashed into the forest and raced ahead on a course that would intercept the fox. He covered the half mile or so in slightly more than a minute and came to a stop in a tiny clearing. His ears told him the fox was approaching, and they also told him that the hounds were converging swiftly on this place.

The fox, a beautiful, tiny, but harried-looking animal, shot into the clearing in a matter of seconds. He slid to a surprised and desperate stop when he saw Percy.

"Relax, I'm a friend," Percy said. His barks were meaningless to him,

but obviously they got his point across. The fox trotted toward him warily. He barked sharply, and Percy got his message: "Where in hell did you come from?"

"Never mind that. Let's shake those dogs."

"I'm all for it. You got any ideas?"

"No."

"Then follow me."

The fox dashed across the clearing and into the woods, with Percy at his tail. They ran to the stream and followed it for several hundred yards, splashing through the shallow water near the bank. The fox swam across the stream at its widest point, and Percy joined him as swiftly as he could. They shook the water from their fur, and plunged into the trees again.

"That'll slow 'em down," the fox barked over his shoulder. "Bunch of dim-witted dogs if I ever saw one. They couldn't find me in their own kennels."

But his optimism wasn't justified by the events of the next hour. Urged on by Dinsmore the hounds kept on their trail, driving them through the forest, across meadows, up and down hills, until they were both panting with exhaustion.

The fox was brilliant and clever, Percy realized, but at the moment it didn't seem that his wits would be enough to save them. They toiled up a steep hill and below them in the fields, the hounds and hunters raced along their trail, barking and yelling with the expectation of the kill.

The fox paused wearily at the crest of the hill, his flanks heaving with exertion.

"I'm all done," he said, with a gasping bark. "What do them dogs get out of this anyway? Why don't they let me alone?"

"We can't give up yet," Percy said. He looked ahead and saw that their

present course would lead them into a narrow canyon.

"Any way out of there?" he asked.

The fox leaped into the air with sudden excitement. "I'm getting soft in the head!" he cried. "There's a tiny tunnel at the end of the canyon. I can get through but the dogs can't. Come on!"

"Hey, wait a minute. What about me?"

The fox paused, studying Percy's huge size. "No, I guess that's out. You'd never make it."

"Well, you go ahead."

"No, we're in this together," the fox said unhappily.

Percy stared at the canyon, and its sweeping walls for a few seconds, and suddenly an idea hit him with the force of a loaded club.

"I got it, I got it!" he cried. "You lead the pack into the canyon. Never mind about me. I'll fix 'em all right if you can get them into that draw."

"That's easy. I'll wait here a few more minutes until they're sure to see me. What are you going to do?"

"Never mind. You just get them into that canyon."

PERCY ran off, grinning happily.

He skirted the mouth of the canyon and scrambled up to a point where he was overlooking its narrow entrance. From here he could see the fox, a tiny figure on the table before the canyon, and below him the noisy hounds and hunters charging up the hill.

The fox pranced about impudently in full sight of the onrushing pack, and then when they had been inflamed to a frenzy by this sight of their quarry, he wheeled and raced into the canyon. Soon the first of the hounds crested the hills and bounded on into the canyon, baying madly. Others followed. Then came the horsemen.

Percy saw Dwight Dinsmore urging his horse brutally. He raised himself in his stirrups and waved an encouraging arm to the other hunters.

"We've got him penned in here," he bawled at the top of his voice. That delighted him, obviously; his voice dripped with passion and excitement.

Dinsmore dashed into the canyon after the hounds, and the remaining horsemen followed him at the same break-neck speed. Percy saw Cynthia in the rear group. She was having a fine time too, he decided. Her lips were flattened over her teeth, and the expression on her face was cruel and triumphant.

"Now let's see how you enjoy a taste of the same medicine," Percy thought with pleasure.

He trotted to the edge of the precipice overlooking the canyon and peered down. The hounds and hunters were several hundred yards into the narrow chasm, and ahead of them he saw the fox hurtling along like a red streak.

Percy turned about and began to scratch furiously at the rocky ground with his hind paws. A trickle of pebbles cascaded over the edge and bounded down the side of the canyon. They dislodged larger pebbles and stones, which in turn joined the growing stream falling and sliding into the canyon.

Percy redoubled his efforts. Stones and rocks flew out from beneath his churning paws, and suddenly he heard a loud ominous roar. Turning he peered into the canyon and saw that a large boulder had broken from the sidewall and was crashing into the mouth of the canyon. Another followed, and then, before Percy's delighted eyes, several tons of dirt and rock slid away and dropped into the canyon with the cannonading roar of artillery. That was the start. For the

next two minutes earth and rock plunged downward in a very impressive landslide, and when the dust eventually began to settle, the entrance to the narrow canyon was plugged with a small mountain of boulders.

Pleased by his work, Percy trotted along the rim of the canyon and studied the reaction of the hounds and hunters trapped by the avalanche. The hounds were taking it pretty well, he saw. There was no sign of the fox, and they were circling anxiously and baying in confusion. The hunters were considerably more perturbed.

Their voices floated up to Percy. "There's been a landslide!"

"We're trapped!"

"Don't lose your heads. I've been through worse things than this and come out top-hole." (That was Dinsmore playing the man of action to the hilt, Percy thought.)

Percy barked triumphantly. He was answered by a shriller but equally happy bark, and, turning, he saw the fox trotting toward him with a wide grin on his face.

"Well, it worked like a charm," the fox said. "That's a neat trick, if I ever saw one. Most wolves are pretty dull, but you're different, my friend."

"Well, thanks."

They studied the trapped pack for the next fifteen minutes, laughing heartily over their explanations of how the landslide had occurred and sneering at their attempts to rescue themselves.

Finally the fox tired of such sport. He thanked Percy profusely for his help, promised to do him a good turn if the chance occurred, and trotted off, tail set at a cocky angle.

Percy went slowly back toward the van Rensaler home. There was no reason for him to choose that as a destination, but it was as good a

place as another. He paused at the stream that ran through their property and drank thirstily, his face plunged deeply into the cold clear water. When he had his fill he smacked his lips, and opened his eyes.

And got a shock!

Staring at him from the water was the pale serious face of Percy Pettibone!

Yes, it had happened again, he realized. He was back in the old body. Standing, he peered at his arms and legs, flexed his fingers, and scratched his head. Yes, everything was okay. But this was getting tiresome. Now a wolf, now a man! It just wasn't natural. Percy wondered gloomily why he had been chosen for this on-again-off-again comedy of mutation. He had a strong feeling now that the sinister young man he'd met at the bar could answer that question.

He trudged the remaining mile to the van Rensaler's in a dispirited frame of mind...

CHAPTER IV

THE PLACE was deserted except for servants. Percy went up to his room, showered and changed because he'd had an exhausting morning, and then went down to the dining room where an elaborate hunt breakfast was laid out on sideboards.

Percy was keenly hungry, and there was enough food around to take care of a famished battalion. Kipper herring, livers in wine and butter sauce, bacon, sausage, eggs, and mounds of toast and biscuits were stacked invitingly on all sides of the room, and three impassive, white-jacketed servants stood ready to serve.

"Was it a good hunt, sir?" one of them asked Percy respectfully.

"Not bad at all," Percy said, help-

ing himself to another egg.

"Did you trap the quarry?" the servant asked, with a subservient twinkle in his eye.

"Oh yes, we trapped them all right." Percy smiled and nibbled at a chicken liver.

"'Them,' sir? Was there more than one?"

"Oh, yes indeed. There was quite a pack."

"I say, that must have been exciting, sir. Are the others coming in soon?"

"That's hard to say," Percy said reflectively. "They were talking about it when I left them!"

"I daresay they'll be along shortly."

"Well, you never can tell," Percy said. "Hunting's a precarious business." He winked cheerfully at the servant and went on with his breakfast.

Afterward he strolled outside. Aimlessly he wandered through the gardens. He heard the murmur of the stream and turned in that direction. When he got to the bank he realized that he had unconsciously made an excellent decision, for Elma Wilson was sitting there on a stool and applying paint to a canvas tacked to a three-legged easel.

"Hello there," he said. "Not intruding, am I?"

"Oh, hello. No, not at all. How was the hunt?"

"Not quite what I expected," Percy said truthfully. "Mind if I watch you work?"

"Of course not."

PERCY sat down with his back to a tree and lit his pipe. It was peaceful and quiet along the stream. Sunlight fell in dappled patterns through the leaves and there was a pleasant smell of earth and water in the air.

Elma Wilson frowned hard as she painted. She was doing a view of the bend of the stream, and it wasn't bad. It was simple and unpretentious, aspiring to nothing more nor less than was in the subject.

She wore a white linen dress and moccasins. Her arms and legs were bare, brown and slimly graceful.

They talked as she worked—idle, non-demanding talk—and Percy found himself relaxing from the tensions that had beset him the past few days. He wished he could tell her about the amazing transformations that had been coming over him, but he dreaded disrupting this peaceful and delightful interlude. He felt she would understand what had happened to him and would listen to him intelligently. She was a tolerant, sympathetic person, he knew.

A sketch pad was beside him on the ground, so he picked it up, took a broad pencil from his pocket and began making a picture of her. When he finished he found somewhat to his confusion that she was watching him with a little smile.

"How did I turn out?" she said.

"I'm sorry. I should have asked your permission first."

"Nonsense. There's a sort of exchange privilege among artists. May I see it?"

"You mightn't like it."

"Well, I'll say so if I don't," she said, smiling.

She studied the sketch for a few moments. Her expression was thoughtful. Finally she looked at him and said, "You're an artist, of course. I mean a real one."

"Thank you," Percy said, flushing with pleasure.

"I don't quite understand you," she said. "This is wonderful work, I know. But you're in the advertising business, I understand."

"Well, there's not too much market

for art today," Percy said. "I have to eat."

"And go fox hunting?"

"You're right, of course. I just don't have the courage to chuck everything and paint. I'd like to, but—"

"It's not my affair. I'm sorry I brought it up."

She turned to her easel and began folding the legs. Percy moved to help her and their hands brushed together lightly. For an instant they looked at each other, and then Elma colored and turned away from him.

They walked back to the house in self-conscious silence.

THE HUNTERS showed up at two-thirty in the afternoon. They were tired, crabby and hungry. The horses were still penned up in the canyon, and grooms were dispatched with picks and shovels to clear the entrance.

Cynthia was in a simmering rage. Her lips tightened when she saw Percy and Elma.

"Where were you this morning?" she demanded of Percy. "Why did you run out on the hunting?"

"Well, it wasn't a bad idea, it seems, considering all the trouble you people got into," Percy said. For some reason he felt more confident in his attitude toward his wife. This didn't escape Cynthia. She looked quickly from Percy to Elma, and made a shrewd guess as to the source of his new strength.

Dwight Dinsmore approached them, drink in hand. He was tired, sweaty and confused. "I'll get that wolf if I have to spend the rest of my life here," he bellowed. "Hear about the wolf, Pettibone?" he said, turning to Percy. "Biggest damn animal ever seen in these parts."

"My, my," Percy said. "And he got away?"

"Yes," but I have a feeling he's

nearby."

"You may be quite right."

"I'd have dropped him if I had a gun with me," Dinsmore said. "Tomorrow will be another story, believe me."

"I want to help you," Cynthia said grimly.

"Good girl!" Dinsmore said, patting her shoulder. "You've got the killer instinct, all right." It was his highest compliment.

Later, when they had gone to their room, Cynthia lit a cigarette and said casually to Percy: "You aren't carrying on with that washed-out Wilson girl, are you?"

"That's a ridiculous thing to say."

"You never can tell." Cynthia smiled and blew a languid plume of smoke in the air. "You've never shown any interest in that direction before, but there's always a first time."

"You're a fine one to be talking." Percy said, suddenly defiant. "How about you and that roaring ass, Dinsmore?"

"Well, how about us?" Cynthia said, and laughed lightly. "Your suspicions, I am pleased to tell you, are thoroughly justified. This isn't the first time by any means."

"I'm not very surprised," Percy said.

"But I don't intend to let you get out of hand, my dear. You see, a stable, outwardly serene marriage, is very important to me. It makes me much more attractive to men. It provides a very safe framework within which to operate. So don't make any more calf-eyes at that Wilson creature. I'll be forced to embarrass her quite ruthlessly, if you do. After all, the injured wife always gets a great deal of sympathy, you know."

"You leave her alone," Percy said, trembling with a strange anger.

"I will if you do," Cynthia said

sweetly. "Now, you must excuse me. I have a date with Dwight."

SHE LEFT the room and Percy slumped into a chair, exhausted and distressed. He knew that Cynthia was perfectly capable of putting her threat into action, which meant he mustn't see Elma Wilson at all for the rest of their stay here. He couldn't stand the thought of dragging her into an embarrassing mess.

Harassed and troubled to the point of desperation, Percy fell into fitful sleep. He dreamed a series of wild dreams, and woke finally, cold and trembling.

He got to his feet and headed for the bathroom with the thought of splashing cold water over his face.

And then he realized that he was trotting!

He whirled about in a circle, his claws digging into the thick pile of the rug, and saw his ropy tail waving like a banner. His heart was hammering with terror. He was caught, trapped! The welcome fastness of the fields and forests were far away. He would be shot down like a dog. No, like a wolf.

He ran to the windows and stood on his hind legs to peer out. It was a long sheer drop to the ground, and anyway, the windows were closed tight. His paws would be unable to open them. He dropped back to the floor and, turning, saw that the door was open. Cynthia hadn't closed it firmly as she left. A ray of hope broke through his gloom. He was out the door in a flash and loping down the hallway to the stairs. Pausing at the head of the stairs he peered into the foyer and saw that it was empty. But the great front door was securely closed.

Have to find another exit, he thought. He scampered down the steps and slid crazily as his paws

struck the marble floor. Getting up, he looked about hopelessly and helplessly, and then slunk down the wide corridor that led to the dining room. He could hear voices coming from there. The hunters were having their long deferred breakfast, obviously.

Percy peered in at them. There were sixteen or eighteen persons in the long dining room. Dinsmore was helping Cynthia to kippered herring. Percy saw, and his host and hostess, the van Rensalers, were quarreling about something or other in bored voices.

Dinsmore was saying heartily, "I tell you, my dear, if I saw that wolf I'd strangle it with my bare hands."

And just at that moment a blonde girl saw Percy. She dropped her plate and began screaming. Heads turned and instantly the room was in bedlam.

Percy had no choice but to chance a wild and bold breakthrough. He dashed into the room, leaped a serving table and headed for the open French doors. Dwight Dinsmore, he saw from a corner of his eye, was leaping for a rifle that was leaning against the wall.

Percy ran down the porch steps and streaked through the rear gardens, past the kennels, where the dogs immediately set up a frantic howling, past the stables, and finally hit the broad open meadows that surrounded the van Rensaler home.

A GLANCE over his shoulder showed him that Dinsmore was running toward the stables with the rifle in his hands, and after him came Cynthia. Percy redoubled his speed. He had to make the woods before Dinsmore had a shot at him; but his luck was running out. Dinsmore was already in the saddle and plunging across the meadow to intercept him before he could get to the

woods. Percy was forced to give up the attempt to reach the forest. He cut off on a right angle and dashed for hilly country.

A bullet whizzed past him, cutting the air spitefully; and then he heard the report of the gun. It shook him with terror. The grass was fortunately high enough to provide some cover, and it made Dinsmore's shooting difficult.

Two more shots screamed past him, and then Percy was in the rocky foothills where there were boulders to hide; he had to get away. And that meant going up the rocky face of the hill and exposing himself to Dinsmore's fire.

He scrambled up the scaly sides of the hill, zig-zagging desperately; and Dinsmore's bullets slammed into the rock causing splintered fragments to carom wildly through the air.

Percy reached the crest of the hill, panting and tired. He plunged the last ten feet in a wild dash, and then he was safe for a moment as the top of the hill was between him and Dinsmore. But it was only a momentary safety. He could hear the horses coming up the side of the mountain, and he heard Dinsmore and Cynthia shouting to them for even greater efforts.

He gathered together what was left of his strength and dashed on across the plateau on top of the hill. Ahead he saw a narrow wooden bridge that had been built across a deep chasm. He headed for it with all his speed.

Crossing it a few seconds later, Percy saw something that brought a surge of hope to his tired heart. The wooden beams on the far side of the bridge were splintered and sagging; the bridge trembled precariously from his comparatively light weight. It wouldn't hold two horses with their riders, he thought exultantly.

Cynthia and Dinsmore would wind up on the rocks two hundred feet below the bridge.

And that was just fine, Percy thought grimly, as he raced across the bridge and headed for a clump of bushes a few hundred feet from the chasm. They were out to kill him without mercy. Why should he be different? Not only were they prepared to kill him as a wolf, they were ready to destroy him as a human being. Cynthia with her cynical idea of marriage; Dinsmore, equally cynical, moving in on her without qualms. They were a precious pair, destructive, amoral, vicious; and they wouldn't be missed.

Reaching the bushes, he turned to watch the bridge. Dinsmore and Cynthia came into sight then, spurring their horses on shouts and yells.

Even at that distance, Percy could see the cruelty in their expressions, the wanton inhumanity in every line of their bodies.

And he knew then, somewhat sorrowfully, that he couldn't go through with his plan. He couldn't let them die. They might be selfish, inhuman, and vicious; but that didn't give him the right to act that way also. An honest man did what was right, because of his convictions; not what was wrong because others behaved wrongly.

Percy knew he had to stop them from crossing the bridge. He trotted out from the bushes and ran forward, barking wildly.

DINSMORE pumped a shot at him; Cynthia squealed with excitement and anticipation.

Percy flattened himself on his belly with the slim hope of providing a less easy target, and continued to bark a warning at the onrushing horses.

But his efforts were unavailing. See-

ing that they weren't stopping, Percy dashed onto the creaking bridge, hurling himself at the horses' churning hooves. He hoped to frighten them into turning back, but they were caught with the passion and anger of their riders by now and nothing but a solid stone wall could stop them.

They thundered onto the weakened bridge, and the supports shuddered once and then snapped with an ominous roar.

Percy wheeled with desperate speed and dashed up the collapsing bridge. He heard a hoarse bellow from Dinsmore and a scream from Cynthia, and they merged with the bleating cries from the horses and the rendering noise from the bridge timbers.

Percy's hind legs found a firm support, and he put all his strength into one giant leap that carried him off the bridge and up to the edge of the chasm. His front paws caught the ground, and his rear paws clawed at the side of the canyon frantically, and then he got up and over and onto level earth. He turned and looked over the edge of the precipice; two horses and two riders lay motionless on the rocky ground far below, their bodies intertangled with the wreckage of the bridge.

He turned away sorrowfully, tiredly, and then his ears pricked up as he heard a light, mocking laugh. Wheeling toward the sound he saw a lean, dark-haired young man sauntering toward him from the edge of the woods. The young man wore a corduroy jacket with tweed trousers, and carried a haversack on his back. He swung a gnarled stick jauntily as he approached Percy. There was the look of the open fields about him, but his eyes were odd; they were the eyes of a devil or saint. Percy recognized him then; he was the Mr.

Black he had met in the taproom such a seemingly long, long time ago.

"Well, let us see what you did with your freedom," Mr. Black said in a bantering tone. "Have you used it wisely? Are you free and happy now? No, I didn't think so." Mr. Black stared down at Percy and a small disappointed smile lurked about the corners of his mouth. "You might have been free if you hadn't tried to stop them from dying. But your conscience got the better of you. You are still helplessly bound by the stifling coils of decency. I see no hope for you at all. Still, I had to try you out. Sometimes my little experiments work very well. Other times they are shockingly disappointing." He sighed and waved his stick at Percy, and Percy suddenly found himself on his hands and knees, back to his normal self again. Rather wearily he got to his feet and dusted off his trousers.

"Why did you choose me?" he asked.

Mr. Black shrugged. "Experience has taught me that no one is quite so evil as a once-good man. I thought

you might be developed into something quite spectacular. Even a werewolf, with luck."

"Who are you?"

"Oh, come now. Let's don't be silly. You know well enough who I am. You won't admit it, and neither will your scientists or philosophers. Even your churches are beginning to deny my existence. That only makes my work easier."

Percy stared into deep mocking eyes—those eyes of a saint or a devil—and knew with whom he was dealing.

"That's better," Mr. Black said. "Goodby my friend. You have some happiness ahead of you, I think. It won't come easy, but it may come if you work at it."

He waved genially to Percy and strolled back to the woods, and his thin lithe figure was soon lost among the trees.

Percy stood alone in the suddenly chill air, shaken and frightened. Then he thought of Elma and squared his shoulders resolutely and started out on the long trip to her.

THE END

the COSMIC QUESTION

by

GLENN OTIS

THERE is a saying current among physicists that "...if your university has money, you build cyclotrons—if it hasn't, you study cosmic rays!" There is a lot of truth in that observation and it accounts probably to a great extent for the tremendous interest in cosmic ray research. Cosmic ray study is the only way you can delve into atomic physics and nuclear studies without spending huge sums of money. As the machines for nuclear research get bigger and more complicated this will become even more true!

The result of all this research on cosmic radiation is fruitful in the extreme, because as of now physicists have not been able to build machines big enough to generate sub-atomic particles with the tremendous energies of cosmic rays. They're getting there, but slowly. In cosmic rays, Nature provides the universe's most powerful laboratory.

There have arisen two schools of thought recently on the origin of cosmic radiation.

The older school has always believed that the penetrating rays come from somewhere in our Galaxy, acquiring their mighty energies from the terrific gravitational and electrical fields associated with the mass of the Galaxy. The newer school thinks that they come from within our own Solar System, some suggesting the Sun as their source. The reasoning is based on the presumed chemical constitution of the source that created them.

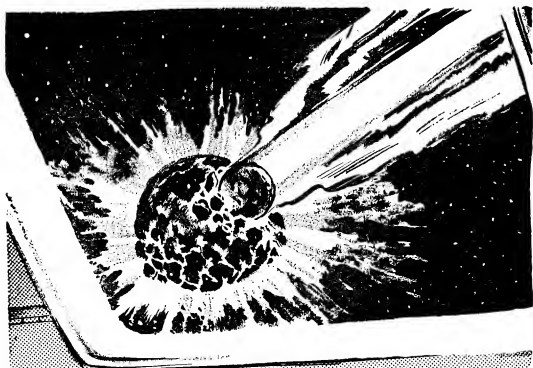
Regardless of which of these two views is true, cosmic ray research is looked upon as an important—perhaps final—source of answers to the atomic riddles confronting us. Even though man-made synchrotrons and linear accelerators and other nuclear machines are being built in huge sizes they are only slowly approaching the power developing capabilities of Nature's cosmic rays. Until such machines become commonplace, we'll spend the near future digging the answers to the nuclear question from cosmic radiation.

THE BETRAYERS

By Gene Hunter



"That," Marko said, "solves one problem. But our biggest job is still unfinished!"



Marko's story was so incredible that the Jovians set out to learn if he was lying. What better way than to give him a woman?

THERE WERE seven men in the control room of the battered XJ-2. Five of them were dead and one was mad and one was unconscious, in the last stages of bleeding to death. A huge Jovian cruiser swooped over to the XJ-2, attached her grappling magnets to the little patrol ship's port side, and in a few moments the XJ-2 had disappeared from space.

Once swallowed up by the cruiser, the Terran craft was examined minutely by her robot conquerors. The dead

and the mad man were ejected into space, and the mangled, broken form that was Commander Richard Marko, TSN, was taken to a compartment that had been hastily converted into a make-shift sick bay.

Injections of every known type of curative drug were needled into his body, broken bones were set with robotic expertness and gaping wounds sewn, salved and bandaged. Probably not even a Chief of the Five Hundred had ever received better care. Certain-

ly no such pains were ever taken for the well-being of any other prisoner of war.

Exactly two and one half Terran hours later, Marko was transferred to the Jovopolis hospital and assigned a suite of rooms with a staff of the top doctors of the Five Hundred constantly in attendance. It was three weeks before he could see again, eight before he could speak and receive oral nourishment and three months before he could walk. His torn and broken features were reshaped until he looked human once more, but with little or no resemblance to his former self.

On the 23rd day of May, 2082, a thin and gaunt Richard Marko was ushered into the chambers of the Chief of the Five Hundred. One of the nine men seated around the long, plastoid table motioned him to a seat. A gleaming robot took a position of attention on either side of him.

There were a few seconds of silence before Klessinger, Chief of the Five Hundred, said: "Commander Marko, the XJ-2 was attempting to make a landing on Jupiter. We want to know why."

Marko shrugged. "Terra has attempted landings before."

Coleman, Jovian Minister of Defense, spoke up: "Always in force," he pointed out. "This is the first time a small craft has ever tried to land alone."

"There is a logical reason for that," Klessinger said. "We want to know what it is. That is why such pains were taken to nurse you back to health."

"Surely Terra knows better than to try to infiltrate saboteurs." This from Hanse, the bespectacled espionage authority.

Marko shrugged again.

Klessinger nodded toward a pale, tight-lipped officer wearing a medical

insignia. "Dr. Carlyle has means at his disposal to secure the information we want from you," he told the captive. "We prefer... cooperation."

"Cooperation," Coleman said, "will insure you your life. Obstinacy means death, as soon as we take what knowledge we want from you."

Marko sighed as if contemplating. The moment he had dreaded most ever since his capture was at hand. He glanced at the stern-faced Dr. Carlyle. This man could use narcotics on him to find out everything they wanted to know. If he lied now, it would have to be a lie big enough for them to swallow. And if he told the truth...

FOR THE third time the captive shrugged, this time defeatedly. "What is it you want to know?" he asked.

"Someone," Klessinger said, "yourself, perhaps, was on that patrol ship for the purpose of landing himself on Jupiter. Correct?"

Marko shook his head. "No one was going to land," he said. "We were going to drop gravs on Callisto. We got sidetracked when we ran into a couple of units of your fleet. We tried to outrun them and got caught."

Coleman smiled. The Minister of Defense was proud of his navy. "Naturally," he said.

Hanse tapped a pencil lightly on the table. "Callisto," he mused. "Isn't Terra aware there's nothing on that moon?"

Marko was silent for some time. The assemblage became restless. "We were going there to wait," the Terran said finally, "for a comet."

Klessinger's thick jowels trembled. The other officers tensed. The robot guards on each side of Marko stiffened.

"I'm not joking," Marko said calmly.

ly. "We were waiting for a comet—Lexell's Comet, to be exact. Maybe you've never heard of it, but it came out of space over three hundred years ago, and like other comets before it, got tangled up in the Jovian system. It played around between this planet and its moons for a dozen years before it was drawn back into space.

"That same comet is coming back, and from what records we have of it, it's believed to be making the same route it did in 1767. The XJ-2 was a suicide ship. We were going to lay in hiding in Callisto, and at the right moment crash the ship with all its power into Lexell's Comet."

Klessinger nodded. "And try to divert it into Jupiter?"

"We were going to play rocket pool with this planet," Marko said calmly. "Lexell's Comet was going to hit smack into Jovopolis and wipe out your whole, damned outfit. But there are lots of expendable ships besides the XJ-2."

Klessinger turned to Coleman. "Now we can appreciate the importance of a rigid defense patrol," he said. "I relegate you to find means of assurance that no other Terran ship will get close enough to carry out their preposterous idea between now and the time the comet enters our atmosphere." He swung around. "Which will be approximately...?"

"Four weeks," Marko said resignedly.

As the robots led him from the room, he heard Hanse say: "He must have told us everything. We hardly need him any more."

WHETHER they needed him any longer or not, Marko decided that Coleman must have been sincere when he promised clemency for information. He was returned to his suite of rooms at the hospital, behind

locked doors with robot guards on the other side, and for a week he saw no one except the robot who examined him and dressed his remaining wounds daily.

His food was delivered by dumb-waiter at regular intervals, and outside of that he experienced no other activity. His days and nights were spent lying on the large, comfortable bed, staring up at the sterile white ceiling above him.

Marko was not a complex man. He was straightforward and a little simple. He had been commissioned only because of his skill as an astrogator. Had he been blessed with a more active mind, the loneliness and inactivity might not have bothered him so much. He had tried to draw his robot attendant into conversation, but the metal monstrosity's only words were curt orders when examining him.

He was almost convinced they intended to let him go insane from boredom, when they brought him the woman.

The robot who had admitted her closed and bolted the door after him. The woman stared at the surprised Marko for several seconds. "I'm Lois Talbot," she said finally. "They've sent me to be your companion."

"I hope you enjoy your work," Marko said dryly.

The woman said nothing more, but walked on into the apartment's unused kitchen and began, woman-like, to rearrange already perfectly arranged utensils. During the rest of the day Marko tried to talk to her, but without response.

Later, when the dumb-waiter delivered a supply of unprepared food, he carried it in to her and sat down by the gleaming metal kitchen table to smoke a synthetic cigaret while she cooked. He got her to speak once or twice, but found her reluctant; al-

most rude. After a while he quit talking and sat back to enjoy the luxury of having a human being wait on him for a change.

Lois was hardly a glamorous creature, but she was passably attractive. Slender to an extreme, grey at the temples, she was thoroughly efficient without appearing masculine.

They spoke only in syllables until midway through the meal, when Lois said: "Marko, after dinner, we can go to bed whenever you want. I want you to understand, it's only a duty assigned me by the Five Hundred."

Marko grinned. "In the navy," he told her, "we would call that preferred duty."

He didn't get the smile he had hoped for.

TRUE TO her appearance, Lois Talbot made an efficient "wife". She cooked well, kept their apartment-prison clean, and saw to it that Marko was provided with changes of clothing. In bed, she neither appreciated nor offered passion. He knew that she considered herself a machine assigned to do his bidding, although she never reminded him of the fact after that first night.

The Terran had questioned her occasionally about her role as his companion, but she always evaded the issue. They had been together a week before she volunteered any information about herself.

He had said: "Lois, if you'd give me a hint as to why you don't like me, both of us might find this relationship a little more pleasant."

It was several seconds before she answered. "You're an enemy," she said, "an officer in the Terran Navy who turned traitor. Perhaps I just don't care for the idea of living with a traitor, no matter which side he's on."

"Because I talked? Being a Jovian, you feel maybe you're being a moral traitor yourself, even if it is an assignment. Right?"

She didn't answer.

"Funny," Marko went on. "I wouldn't have thought of you as being politically minded."

"All of us have been concerned with politics these last few years. Ever since the first strike of stellarium," Lois said.

"Stellarium," Marko mused. "Just think, if men didn't want to reach the stars, we wouldn't be in a war at all. It's too bad Terra began by colonizing Jupiter with undesirables."

He said this last without thinking. It was a favorite theme of Federation newspapers, and something Marko and his fellow officers had talked about several times.

Lois flared up at his words. "It's too bad everyone's ancestors weren't lilies," she said testily. "Were yours? Are you?"

MARKO FELT the sting in her words and realized he had insulted her. Before he could apologize, she said: "Our grandfathers were rugged men who couldn't adjust to Terra's trade laws eighty years ago—not 'undesirables'."

"Our history books call them pirates, thugs and misfits," Marko said hotly.

"They were misunderstood men who were exiled to populate a barren world under the most difficult and trying circumstances," the woman retorted.

"You sound as if you were quoting. Anyway, their descendants have done pretty well. When five hundred men can defy a three-planet federation, I'd call that an achievement not to be sneezed at."

She drew herself up proudly. "I don't understand your idiom, but it

is an achievement. I'm glad you realize it."

"I do," Marko said, "but you can't win. The best you can hope for is a stalemate."

"Nor can we lose," she replied. "We're the best protected world ever known. Life can't exist except inside the bubble cities or the tunnels, and we have more robots than you or I can even guess at for space fighters. Without stellarium, Terra can never reach the stars. That would be victory for us."

"But why?" Marko demanded, exasperated. "What makes you so cocksure Terra is such a grasping, selfish world?"

"From its past history," Lois answered. "From the way its government treated my ancestors, sending them to a poisonous, uninhabitable world to die."

She smiled proudly, and Marko found himself admiring her, in spite of his loyalty to Terra.

"But they didn't die," she went on. "They brought civilization to a world everyone said couldn't be colonized. Now the planet Terra called the 'Outlaw World' is going to rule the Solar System—is going to reach the stars!"

Her voice had risen to an almost hysterical pitch! Marko, now silent, studied her. He pitied her—this woman from a coldly logical, mechanical world. And he was a little surprised to find that he loved her as well.

THE DAYS that followed passed more swiftly and pleasantly with the woman as a companion. They never let their tempers get out of control again, after that first outburst. Both of them seemed still convinced that the other held mistaken beliefs, but they no longer tried to convert one another with such persuasion.

They continued to spend their days

talking. She told him, calmly and with little emotion, more of Jupiter's history, and of the five hundred men who ruled the planet.

From her he learned how the first exiles had built the first bubble city of Jovopolis and how the early explorers had discovered the valuable mineral deposits that a depleted Terra so desperately needed. More exiles and their families had been sent to harvest the riches of the giant world for what Lois called the greedy Terran Federation, but it had been impossible to mine the ore in quantities great enough to satisfy the home planet.

Finally Terra had sent the robots who were unaffected by Jupiter's dangers and the back-breaking labor of bringing the ore out of the planet's tough hide. Gradually, control of the robots had slipped into the hands of the Jovians.

It had been a highly profitable arrangement for all. Terra received untold quantities of valuable ores, and in return supplied the Jovians with food and the other necessities needed to sustain life on the barren world.

THEN, ONE day in Saint Louis, a young chemist for a Federation company had amazed the scientific world by discovering minute quantities of a new element in a shipment of Jovian radium. Experiment had showed that the atoms of the new element could be exploded more swiftly and in more rapid succession than any other known. This new element, according to all indications, would be able to propel a spaceship across interstellar space to the stars in a matter of years, rather than the centuries theoretically required by standard, uranium-powered vessels.

Civilization was on the verge of a new era, when suddenly Jupiter had closed its doors. The new element,

now called stellarium, was found only on Jupiter and two of its moons, Io and Ganymede. It was impossible to manufacture synthetically. Jupiter controlled the only practical means of crossing the vastness between the stars, and it wouldn't let go.

The outlaw world girded up its loins to hold its quarter over the Federation. The most prominent scientists and technicians banded themselves into a government they called the Five Hundred, while an outraged Terra still gaped at these descendants of the outlaws who had originally settled the huge planet.

They captured two dozen rockets that were berthed at the bubble city when the stellarium discovery was made, and while Terra still dickered to end the situation, the Five Hundred armed them and started building factories to manufacture more.

Finally, Terra attacked. The Jovians had stood in the streets and laughed while the bombs and rays from the Terran spaceships exploded impotently or bounced back from the impenetrable walls of the bubble. The Terran Federation had attacked again and again, with exactly the same result.

Now, in Marko's time, the war had settled into one of spatial dog fighting, with Terra futilely attempting to make landings while the robot spacemen fought them back with the precision of a mechanical chess player defeating a blindfolded child. For five years the war had raged, and Terra, without even enough stellarium on hand for a one-way trip to the nearest star, was as far from gaining an advantage as ever.

TWICE during their sojourn together, Lois Talbot was called away from the apartment—the first time for two hours, the second for considerably longer. Neither time would she divulge

where she had gone or whom she had seen, and after the first time Marko did not press the matter. He himself would have been content to spend the rest of his life in the comfortable prison without a twinge of conscience. Escape was out of the question, and he could do the Terran cause little good by dying in the attempt.

But a few days after Lois' second visit outside the apartment, Marko himself was summoned by one of the robot guards. "Go ahead," Lois told him when he turned to her. "I'll be here when you get back." She tinged the last with the faintest sarcasm, and Marko blushed.

The robots led him down the same corridors and through the same vestibules as before and into the same room to face the same assembly of uniformed men. This time the leaders of the Five Hundred were more cordial and less frigid. He was offered a comfortable chair, a drink and cigarettes, and the robots were dismissed.

Marko looked about him a little wryly. "You must have become fond of me," he said.

Klessinger laughed the laugh of a superior trying to bring himself to the level of an underling. "Surely you can't dislike our hospitality," he said.

"Perhaps it's just that I was never used to being wooed—at least until I came here."

Klessinger smiled again. "We've had a definite reason for . . . wooing you," the Chief of the Five Hundred replied.

"I've gathered that." Marko sat back more comfortably in the huge chair.

"What awaits you back on Terra, Marko?" Klessinger asked suddenly.

Marko pursed his lips. "Meaning?"

"When Terra finally gives up and this war is over, what will you go back to?"

I won't be going back, the Terran

thought. Aloud he said: "I was an astrogator for Federation Rockets."

"You were. Terra's been at war with us for five of her years. This war could last twice that long, if your government insists on being stubborn. If you ever get back and out of the service, you'll be an old man—exceptionally old, according to spatial standards."

Marko nodded. "So?"

"We—the Five Hundred—offer you more than you can ever have from Terra," Klessinger said. He leaned forward, a business man cagily getting to the point. "Glory and fame. Perhaps riches you can't dream of. And if you still want to feel altruistic, a chance to end this war forever."

"I'm interested," Marko said frankly. "I still don't see the point."

"Ever since the discovery of stellarium," Klessinger said, "Jupiter has worked toward but one goal. The war has been only a stalling operation, giving us time to get ready. For the past five years we have been building a spaceship, the largest ever known. Now, at last, it has been completed."

He paused, letting Marko savor his words. He looked around at his companions. "Powered by stellarium, our ship is going to reach the stars. Finally, we are going to see our people on a world on which it is pleasant to live!"

The Chief of the Five Hundred had risen from his seat and was shouting with fanatical fury at the Terran. Marko had leaned forward, sharing part of the excitement.

"A world where we can breathe Nature's air and not have to manufacture our own! Where our descendants can live beneath a warm sun, not a fabricated bubble! Jupiter will become a major power. We will be the first to cross interstellar space, and we can populate our new world with robots

like the ones we've used against your government during the war. From a down-trodden, poverty-stricken race, ours will rise to become the greatest power of all!"

KLESSINGER seemed to calm suddenly. He sat down and poured another drink, and Marko saw that his hands were trembling. He seemed lost in his dream, forgetting the presence of the Terran.

"And where do I come in?" Marko asked.

Klessinger started. "Jovians have been bound to this planet for generations. Our spaceship is crude, perhaps, compared to the ones that will follow it, because our people know far too little about the construction of larger vessels. Our knowledge of astronomy is negligible. We know from what we have read that Alpha Centauri has planets believed capable of supporting human life, but we could not chart the course there with safety."

"And I am an astrogator," Marko said.

"You are. You can pilot a ship loaded with colonists and robots to Alpha Centauri. You could become the Moses of your time, transporting a whole civilization across space to a new world."

"So that was the reason for Lois," Marko said. "To feed me propaganda until I began to sympathize with Jupiter. So I'd be ripe for this."

"Well," the bespectacled Hanse said, speaking for the first time, "aren't you? Don't you want to be the first man to cross interstellar space? Don't you relish the idea of carving a new civilization in the stars?" Like Klessinger, he seemed carried away by his own eloquence.

The Terran was silent, thoughtful. At last he said: "What if I say OK?"

What if I do pilot your ship to Alpha Centauri? Who'll be my passengers—the Five Hundred and their women?"

Klessinger sighed. "Our motives are selfish for the race as a whole," he said, "not just for ourselves. Your passengers will be youngsters, barely in their teens. By the time you reach Centauri, they'll be young adults, ready to take over a world. The Five Hundred will stay behind until Jupiter is finally abandoned, to direct all operations."

"For the race," Marko repeated. "The oldest fanatical ideology in the world. My God, man—why not share stellarium with Terra. Come to terms. We're ready to compromise after all these years. Maybe even grant you independence in return."

Coleman, the Minister of Defense, snorted. "Share stellarium with Terra? Jovians are going to rule space, not these grasping maggots. We're offering you fame—power—respect. Everything you can never have from Terra. Are you going to turn all that down?"

Marko said, "What about Lois?"

"She'll go with you, of course."

The Terran stood up. He was quiet for a very long time. Then he said: "All right. It's a deal. I'll pilot your kids to Centauri."

WITHIN A week, Terran time, all preparations had been made. Marko had inspected the *Jovian Colonist* and found her spaceworthy, if crude. The hundred teen-age Jovians, representing all the healthy, mentally fit youngsters on their world, had been herded aboard and briefed on their long mission. Provisions of all types, including a huge supply of food concentrates, had been stored and the interstellar ship given her last-minute touches and check-ups.

Marko had spent the time charting

their course to the star that was now so near, checking and rechecking his figures. Lois had seemed to thaw toward him somewhat, although she was still aloof, and at times nervous. Marko wondered often what future was ahead of them and whether or not she would ever come to really care for him.

But he was busy most of the time, and there was little chance to dwell on probabilities. Star maps showed that Alpha Centauri supported at least three planets, all of them small and comfortable near their sun. Pluto-based astronomers had been studying the nearby system for years with an eye to someday voyaging there, and although much of their knowledge was known to the Five Hundred, the Jovians had not learned how to apply it.

Finally Marko chose the outermost planet, primarily for reasons of safety. He knew little about stellarium, and he reasoned that an attempt to land on the farthest world would cut down their chances of plunging on into the sun.

Naturally, he thought, the Five Hundred would stay behind. He had not fooled himself as to their motives. It would take this first ship over four years to reach its destination, and that made all the colonists expendable. In that time, if this first expedition failed, a new generation would be ready for another try, and the Jovian leaders would still be safe in their bubble city.

But he had made his decision, and he was not going to back down. In fact, he seemed almost overly anxious to leave. Largely due to his own efforts, blast-off time had been shortened by more than a week.

He often wondered why Lois was not happier now that the plans of her people were about to be realized. Once when he spoke to her about it, she

said: "Of course I am, Marko. It was my assignment to condition you for your last interview, to give you something of our side of the story. Evidently, I did my job well. It didn't take too much to convince you."

"Can a man be blamed for wanting to better himself?" he asked. "If Jupiter gives me a chance to head the first expedition to another star, shouldn't I take it?"

"For your personal glory?" Lois asked pointedly.

"What of it? Why else is your own world monopolizing stellarium? Sometimes you sound almost as if you didn't approve of your own government."

She did not reply, but turned back to her kitchen.

THERE WAS neither fanfare nor cheering. There was no shouting as there would have been on Terra, and not a parent was there to bid his offspring *bon voyage*. The cold emotionless nature of the Jovians extended even to their own children, Marko decided, and he wondered how such a world ever hoped to control the universe. The same ideologies had been tried so many times in the history of his own world, and they had never succeeded.

So it was with only a few words of fanatical good cheer from Klessinger and the rest of the Five Hundred's top leaders that the *Jovian Colonist* blasted off from Jovopolis when that side of the planet was facing away from the sun and streaked into the heavens.

In the control cabin that would be their home for nearly five years, Marko and Lois watched on the vision screen while the huge world gradually grew smaller behind them. Five of the planet's moons were visible, and along with them appeared a brilliant

red and yellow dot moving rapidly toward Jupiter in the upper right corner of the screen.

Lois pointed to it excitedly. "A comet," she said, and as Marko nodded unconcernedly, she asked: "Lexell's Comet, by any chance?"

Marko laughed. "So you knew about my 'mission'?"

"Of course I knew. Is that really Lexell's Comet?"

"Jupiter has a family of comets that are always around," the Terran said. "We'll probably spot several more before long. No one knows the course of Lexell's Comet. It's too erratic." He had turned and was checking the gauges on the *Jovian Colonist's* control panel. "All I know about it is what I read in my astrogation courses."

"YOU'RE A liar, Marko," Lois said evenly. Startled by the change in her voice, Marko spun around. The woman had a blaster leveled at his chest. There was an expression on her face that he had never seen there before.

"A liar and a coward," she said. "A chicken-hearted traitor."

"What are you—" Marko began, but Lois cut him short.

"For weeks I've lived with you," she said, "hating you every minute of the time, but still trying to understand you. And before that—for the last five years—I've had that damned propaganda fed to me in steady doses. 'Jovians are the master race. Jupiter will inherit the stars.'" If she had been a man, Marko believed she would have spat. Instead her eyes narrowed and her hand tightened on the blaster.

"And I've hated it all," she said. "My people weren't exiled outlaws. **My father was a Federation mineralogist, stationed at one of the mines**

when stellarium was discovered. Klesinger's men killed him because he put up a fight, but they had no way of knowing if everyone was a native Jovian or not, and I had lived there three-quarters of my life. They didn't suppose there could be one among them who didn't feel as they did."

While she talked he had adjusted the vision screen's dials, bringing the shrinking Jovian system back close to them. The comet was a tiny red dot at the head of a pencil-line of fire, growing steadily larger. Lois edged closer.

"Turn this ship around, Marko, or I'll start blasting you a little at a time until you do. For years I've waited for a chance to do my part for my native planet. I'd intended to take over this ship and take it back to Terra, but now I see a better way."

"We have no arms, no audio," Marko said. "A Terran ship would blast us out of space."

She ignored him. "First I'll burn your legs, one at a time," she said. "Then, if you don't turn this ship around, you'll get it in the arm. I'll leave you alive and screaming until you do as I say."

MARKO LEAPED, knocking the gun aside just as she fired. The beam plowed a molten furrow in the control cabin's overhead, and Marko shuddered. He twisted the gun out of her hand and threw it.

He slapped her hard across the face with his open hand. She staggered back against the bulkhead, her hand to her cheek, suddenly a woman again instead of a wild thing. She was sobbing. Her moment was over.

"Now listen," Marko said. "You want me to follow that comet into Jupiter's atmosphere and try to ram it into Jovopolis, simply because it and the city face each other. It would

be easier to smash a flea on an elephant's hide by tossing a pebble. We don't even know if the comet is going to enter the atmosphere. If we turned back, the Jovians would think we were deserting to Terra and blast us out of existence. Even if we got through and sacrificed ourselves and this shipload of kids—even if the comet did hit the planet—there'd be no chance of destroying the world. Jupiter's too big. It's an impossibility."

Lois was quiet now, listening to him closely. "When the Five Hundred questioned me," Marko went on, "I had to think of a lie big enough for them to swallow. Not to save my own hide, but to keep them from using narco-syns on me and finding out the XJ-2's real mission. I played on their ignorance of physics and astronomy, and it worked. The idea of smashing a comet into Jupiter was so preposterous that they believed it. The real plan was fantastic, but not so fantastic that it wouldn't work. And if you and I had stayed on Jupiter a few more days, we'd be so dead there wouldn't even be pieces of us left.

"Our mission was accomplished before they got me. We had already been to Callisto and were on our way back when we ran into that patrol. Right now, on that little moon"—he pointed to a tiny dot near Jupiter's surface—"there is cached Terra's only supply of stellarium, at the bottom of a mile-long, steelite-lined tunnel that I helped to bore.

"It's capped with a time-fuse, and it's going to explode and shoot that moon like a huge cannonball as soon as it and Jupiter are in juxtaposition. When they meet, it'll look like half the Universe is exploding, and we'll be safe out here—just watching. Then all Terra will have to do is go through a new belt of asteroids and pick up the pieces in order to get all the stel-

larium they are likely to need."

HE STOPPED, out of breath. Lois was looking at him half-believingly. "But—but if you're telling the truth, why hasn't it happened already? You've been on Jupiter for four Terran months now."

"Not quite," Marko said. "We had to give our units nearby enough time to withdraw, a few at a time, so as not to arouse suspicion. It was our only chance of ending the war, and we didn't want to take the slightest risk of the Jovians catching on to any sudden retreat. During the weeks since I was captured, every Terran ship has gradually left the area, withdrawing just far enough to watch the fireworks. Now, when that fuse goes off, we'll see Jupiter destroyed."

Lois sat down, shocked and exhausted. She looked up at Marko's strained face and said: "I believe you. But, my God—you would have been killed, too, if you had stayed. And I called you a coward!"

After a moment, she asked: "So now do we go back to Terra?"

Slowly, Marko shook his head. "There's nothing for me at home except a medal and a few kind words," he said. He pointed forward. "Out there is Alpha Centauri, and if that system shouldn't be habitable, there are others. We've got a shipload of kids back there, and almost five years in which to re-educate them to the right way of thinking. We've got enough provisions to last for two generations, damned near enough stellularium to take us around the galaxy, and a stock pile of robots to do the heavy work. When Terra finds us at Alpha Centauri a few years from now, she'll find her first interstellar colony all ready and flourishing—and flying the Federation flag."

He put his arms tenderly about his woman and she smiled up at him, a new light in her eyes.

"Not back to Terra, Lois," he said. "To the stars."

THE END

the

BIGGER EYE

THE TWO hundred inch reflecting telescope at Mount Palomar is indeed a wonder of modern engineering technique. It has cost, so far, about seven million dollars over the twenty years of its building, and were it to be duplicated today it would cost three times that much! Furthermore, during the course of its construction it presented problems in engineering techniques that seemed insoluble—even though they were finally solved. As a result of all this, it does not seem likely that a larger mirror will ever be ground, although some plans have been advanced to that end. The effort and the time and the money would simply be impossible. Especially in light of the fact that so soon we'll have an observatory on the Moon!

But there is another approach to large telescope building which offers great possibilities. Why not, ask some experimentalists who have tried their hand at it, make numerous small sixty inch mirrors, and then mount them on a fixed surface all focusing on a common point? Theoretically, this way, you could build up a reflect-

ing mirror of any diameter—say up to two hundred feet!

The idea isn't fantastic and a number of smaller test telescopes using this method have been built. They work like a charm. In the case of the large hypothetical scope there would be only one major drawback; the instrument would naturally be fixed to cover only a certain strip in the sky, but this is countered by the fact that several such instruments could be arranged to give adequate coverage of the important celestial objects.

It appears highly likely that such a project will be attempted because it is not in the same cost range as the two-hundred inch. And even though the condition of the atmosphere has a good deal to do with the use of a telescope, modern astronomers would naturally welcome a larger one. Until that Moon observatory is actually constructed, astronomers will be crying to high heaven for bigger and bigger telescopes! This is one answer to their problem.

THE END

by

JOHN WESTON



The CLUB HOUSE

Where science fiction fan clubs get together.

BY ROG PHILLIPS

SOMETIME in the late nineteen twenties I picked up a book in the public library by H. G. Wells. I don't remember the title of the book, but it was the first so-called story by that great author I had ever read and considered trite, poorly written, and worst of all, stupidly inaccurate. It concerned World War I. I knew nothing more of that war than the average person who retains less than half of what he reads, but the errors were so numerous that I was more than slightly disillusioned about my then favorite sf author. When I finished the book I wondered how a supposedly intelligent writer of international reputation could be so dumb. It didn't seem possible. Not until then did I look at the title page of the book and discover that it had been published in 1911!

In that moment of shocked surprise while the realization soaked in that H. G. Wells had portrayed World War I before it happened, and with such accuracy that I had read it all the way through without realizing the truth, I recognized the potentialities of that type of prophecy which might conservatively be called *estimating the implications of the present*.

He had used no crystal ball, nor had he consulted any authority higher than his own analytical mind. I began to wonder why the leaders of government didn't develop the same talent and use it.

The newspapers, suddenly, took on a new and wonderful facet of meaning. Until then I had been content to read one favorite newspaper. Now I began buying them all in whatever city I happened to be, and comparing their individual slants and the way they pointed up one view or another in various subtle ways.

Current events took on, gradually, the same glamor that had belonged peculiarly to science-fiction up until then. On occasion I detected some hidden current, some obscure implication, that none of the news columnists had apparently seen. Often I was completely off base in my estimations. Occasionally I was, so far as I knew from reading all the newspapers, the only one who had guessed right.

It was and still is my most engrossing hobby. Occasionally I've employed it in a story. The techniques of estimating the implications of any given situation are at the basis of any writer's attempts to write

a story of any type.

A successful writer is one who can write along on a theme, think back over what he has written, and then come out with quite logically inevitable results that ninety-nine percent of the readers wouldn't have guessed, yet which after seeing, they recognize as being most inevitable. And the difference between applying such talents to story writing and to world affairs is that in the story it's only necessary to outguess the reader usually, while in world events it's necessary to make the guess agree with events when they develop.

There was a time when I, so far as I knew, was the only one who had guessed the potential of Hitler. If I had had the courage of my conviction and the kind of fanaticism it would have taken, I could possibly have prevented World War II by going to Germany and assassinating him before he became reichschancellor! And in line with that type of guessing, I drew the same conclusions about a certain man in the United States, only to have somebody else for reasons known only to himself actually do the job. The trouble with assassinating somebody who is rather obscure, because you think he might eventually upset world conditions, is that if you do it—or somebody else does—you can never know for sure if you were right!

My conclusion about that man was, and still is, that if he had not been assassinated he would have become President instead of Roosevelt, and today we would be numbered among the total dictatorships!

So, you see, the game of estimating the future from the present is extremely fascinating. There's no hokus pokus to it. In the years I've engaged in it for my own private satisfaction I've found that my wrong guesses were as instructive to me as my right guesses, because when I guessed wrong I went after the reasons why I had guessed wrong.

When I wrote "So Shall Ye Reap" in 1946 I wove some of the conclusions I had formed then about the future into that story to give it realism. I did not think then, nor do I think now, that the basic premise of that story was correct. In short, I don't believe some unknown development from the atom bomb will make the surface of our planet uninhabitable. But on many of the serious predictions I wove into that story only my timing was off.

In my recent attempt along those lines, "Who Sows The Wind...", I again don't believe the major premise, that large scale atom bombing would permanently alter the major climatological pattern of the globe in such a way that it would alter geography.

But that story brings up something else. In a science fiction magazine it is extremely risky to call a spade a spade when it comes to specific world developments. Howard Browne recognized that fact and laughed it off by saying that if everything was rosy with Russia by the time the story was set in type he could yank out *Russia* and put in the name of whatever other country we were sore at at the moment. There was little risk that that would be necessary, and of course that possibility didn't materialize.

The world conflict continues, and my guessing game continues. I've often thought that if I ever branched out into something besides writing science fiction and conducting the *Club House* it would be wonderful if it could be into the publishing of a little news sheet in which I analyzed the news behind the news about once every two weeks. Would you like to know what's really going on? Hmmm? If enough people subscribed to the idea I would be definitely tempted...

* * * * *

A letter was in the stack lately from Dennis Strong, 942 Scribner N.W., Grand Rapids, Mich., asking me to write an article for his fanzine, *CHIMERICAL REVIEW*. The article he wanted me to write was one telling fans how to write—not pro fiction—but fan fiction. He pointed out that there are fans who get rejects from fanzines for their stories. He presented his case so well that I thought it over and decided maybe I could give a few instructive viewpoints on how to write. So I did, and whether they're good or bad, they're points you won't find in a book on writing with the same slant I gave them. If you want to read it send Dennis fifteen cents and tell him you want that copy of his zine. (He promised to give me fifty percent of the second million, after taxes, he makes on that issue.)

Unlike most such articles, I didn't go into detail about the mechanics of story writing, nor touch on anything much at all. I just gave and explained briefly seven points that anyone who wants to become a writer must become *OBSESSED* with to the point where they mold his outlook twenty-four hours a day. Whether he wants to be a fan writer or a pro writer is not important at this stage.

* * *

Another letter in the same mail should be reproduced here in full, because it concerns the future of fandom.

Here it is:

Rog Phillips,
The Club House,
Amazing Stories.

Dear Rog,

Thanks a lot for the wonderful plug you gave us *Nameless Ones* in the July issue. Not very long ago we were completely unheard of; it certainly helps to get a pat on the back once in a while.

About that convention bid—we've had the idea in mind ourselves! Just give us a bit more time. Say along about 1954...

Glad you liked *Toskey's Impossible*. Judging from what I saw at his house the other night, he has a few items coming up that should set the fan world back on its heels. Watch the artwork, in particular.

Ed Walthers, Jr.,
President,
The Nameless Ones,
Route 1, Box 478C,
Bellevue, Wash.

That's the annual science fiction convention held over Labor Day weekend each year. The one for this year is being held in New Orleans. For information about this year's convention write to Harry B. Moore, 2703 Camp St., New Orleans 13, La..

* * * * *

Usually the order in which I review fanzines means nothing. I take them in the order they get stacked up. This time there's going to be an exception. I'm giving a zine first place as a place of honor. The reason for that is that I (who, me?) feel very humble at having received this fanzine, and have thumbed through its pages, pausing here and there to read, with a feeling of reverence I seldom have experienced for anything. That fanzine is:

SANDALWOOD AND JADE: price not given, but definitely worth fifty cents of anyone's money! A photo-offset booklet containing the collected poems of Lin Carter with beautiful artwork and a photograph. These are poems of the weird, the mystic, the cosmic. They are poetry in its finest sense, and after reading it I am convinced that Lin is destined to be acclaimed one of this century's greatest poets. Even if he dropped dead this very moment, which I usually feel a poet should do after I read his efforts, but definitely don't about Lin. As the Japanese say, "May he live ten thousand years!"

I'm not even sure he has enough printed to sell to everyone who wants one, but for one of the greatest treasures fandom has yet produced send for it. Send fifty cents to Lin Carter, 1734 Newark St., St. Petersburg, Florida.

* * *

FANTASY ADVERTISER: 15c; bi-monthly; 1745 Kenneth Road, Glendale 1, California. Just what it says, an adver-

tising medium for fans who want to buy or want to sell or trade prozines, books, and other things of interest to the stf collector or the fan who wants to find back issues of his favorite zines. Due to its large circulation ad rates are rather high, starting with 50¢ per column inch to six dollars for a full page ad. And from the volume of advertising in it it must be worth it to the advertisers.

In addition to finding this zine the open sesame to past issues of magazines at reasonable prices listed in the advertisements, there are articles and book reviews that fill many worthwhile pages. In the April issue on hand for review is another installment of a paper read to the British Interplanetary Society in London on April 1, 1950, "Space-travel in Fact and Fiction", by Arthur C. Clarke. With it are reproductions of magazine covers depicting spaceships of various types.

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IMPOSSIBLE: no price listed; April issue; Burnett R. Toskey, 3933 15th N.E., Seattle 5, Washington. Mimeographed by Wally Weber. A production of the NAMELESS ONES. Editorial policy, to drive all prozines out of business by making IMPOSSIBLE the best zine, pro or fan, in existence. In his editorial Burnett makes a delightful game out of reporting on the death throes of each individual prozine on the stands.

Cover this issue is by Chisler Bonetall and depicts sunrise on Neptune. The stories are all tops, but I enjoyed "Adventures of I, Pinkenfafph" the most. He was the man who mixed Lux Beauty Soap and Evening In Paris to make a rocket fuel and used an old Bendix washer to make a spaceship, and flew nonstop to the Moon. Only thing wrong with it was it was too short.

"Getting Material for Your Fanzine", by Wally Weber should solve all the troubles of any faned who lacks both material and a conscience.

"The Darkened Light," by Phillip Barker is twenty-six pages long, which sets some kind of record for fan stories. It's an excellent planet story.

* * *

STEF CARD: 6/50¢; Walter Coslet, Box 6, Helena, Montana. This newscard on the standard penny card is going large size in the next issue, 4 pages, 7x11. Walt has done a very good job of condensing the news into a penny postcard. He's one of the most active of actifans, attending all the conventions and taking his share of the auction home with him. By now he must have plenty of original covers and interiors decorating his walls.

In the expanded STEF he'll have some new departments, too.

* * *

WOOMERA: 15¢; Nick Soltseff, 184 Girraween Road, Girraween, N.S.W.,

Australia. It's really wonderful to get a fanzine from our friends down under. And in these troubled times it points up the fact that the world won't be a safe place to live in until we are reviewing fanzines that are the free expression of their writers and editors from such places as Moscow and China. There is already a Japanese *Amazing Stories* published regularly, and perhaps one of these days we'll be welcoming Japanese stf fans into the fold!

But to get back to WOOMERA, it's a printed zine. Some artwork, a red paper cover. This first issue, February 1951, contains part one of a story by Vol Molesworth, "Let There Be Monsters." (Did you know a young monster is called a youngster? Howard missed that in his stf daffinities!)

"A Survey of Fan Affairs" is a serious intelligent discussion of the prozine field by Graham B. Stone. "The British Prozines" by Roger N. Dard contains the interesting news that SCOOPS was the name of the first British stf magazine, with its first issue in 1934.

Most important department is the Australian fan directory which gives the names and addresses of most of the Australians fans.

If you don't know how to order from Australia you can get this zine by ordering through James V. Taurasi, 137-03 32nd Ave., Flushing, N.Y..

* * *

PEON: 9 for \$1.00; Charles Lee Riddle, PN1, USN, Fleet All Weather Training Unit, Pacific, c/o Fleet Post Office, San Francisco, California, with M. J. Anders, G. F. Pecha, and Max Riddle assisting. Wonder what department Max Riddle runs? Puzzles?

This zine is published in Hawaii, which is a long way away. In the editorial Charles tells of the visit of his mother, of seeing two Buck Rogers movies. He's married and has two children, Ira and Robbie.

They're all developing into stf enthusiasts. As I write this review MacArthur is in Hawaii, and perhaps Charles and his family has seen the General.

Joe Kennedy leads off with an article on prozine covers. "The Annals of Aardvark" discusses dianetics, being somewhat agin the new mind fad. And somewhat pessimistic about any possible plans to squelch it.

"Messengers of Death" by Ed Ludwig is tops for interest in this issue. He gives instances of weird apparitions that announce by their presence the imminent death of someone in the family. And some of them are really unusual.

There's plenty more in the twenty-eight pages of PEON, and it's put out as a hobby by boys in the armed forces on duty in Hawaii. You can't go wrong in subscribing to PEON and helping them out in their pastime.

* * *

JOURNAL OF SPACE FLIGHT: official publication of the Chicago Rocket Society. Twelve mimeographed pages. Twenty-five cents. 10630 South St. Louis Ave., Chicago 43, Illinois.

Rocket Abstracts are excerpts gleaned from over 100 journals which are of interest to those studying the field of rocket propulsion and space flight.

An interesting article this time by Herman Bartenbach is about the use of rockets for extremely rapid flight from one point on the earth to another through the atmosphere.

If you live near Chicago you might like to attend the meetings of the Society. Write the above address for information.

* * *

CENSORED: 20c; published irregularly by Fred Hurter Jr., in collaboration with the Montreal Science Fiction Society, and being handled by Moe Diner, 4814 Wilson Ave., N.D.G. Montreal, P.Q., Canada. They must have a new mimeo because all the print is unusually sharp and clear. There are twenty-eight members to this Montreal group. Somehow I don't consider Canada another country in my thinking.

There are fifty-two pages. Did you ever mimeo fifty-two pages, assemble them in order, staple them together, paste a heavy paper gorgeous back on it, then neatly trim the edges in a cutter? The assembling and makeup are evidence of careful and expert planning, too.

Remember the Rover Boys stories? In this issue is "The Great Marine Disaster", or, "The Rover Boys in Monte Carlo", by K. Richardson, which might be a parody on my "Who Sows the Wind..." if it had been written after my story was published. J.W. Campbell Jr. has an article in defense of dianetics. Some of his statements are quite remarkable. For example, "Psychiatry is badly in need of a fresh approach; the present approach is over half a century old, and has produced no notable advances." He also states, "...the continuing high population of our institutions is, in itself, an indictment of the present methods." Those statements are surprising, coming from Campbell. Could it be that dianetics gives one the license to depart from reason? Or is logical thinking engrammatic...?

One of the best things about CENSORED is the humorous cartoons that appear here and there a la the Post style.

* * *

FANTASY-TIMES: 10c; 12/\$1.00; James V. Taurasi, 137-03 32nd Ave., Flushing, N.Y.. The newzine that comes out every two weeks, with all the news about prozine and pro and fan developments of the preceding two weeks. In the issues on hand for review Mr. Taurasi does a lot of investigating of rumors that this and that prozine is folding. Probably

a lot of them actually will if things get worse. That's one of the hard facts of life, that when things get too good the only way they can go is down. There are too many magazines on the stands for the market to support them all. The March F-T reports on the Japanese *Amazing*. Some of my own stories are in the Japanese magazine.

There is also an article, "Fan Feeling Against Dianetics is Growing," which surveys fan reaction to this latest "mystery". And there's the scoop that Sam Merwin resigns from editorship of TWS and Startling Stories to devote full time to free lance writing.

* * *

FAN-FARE: the fiction fanzine; 15c; W. Paul Ganley, 119 Ward Rd., N. Tonawanda, N.Y., the Snazzy Skyrocket Press. "What the Cat Dragged In", the correspondence section, complains of lack of letters. It's conducted by Bob Briney. "Dormitory of the Dead," by Alice Bullock has a nice theme. "Shadows in the Fog" by Franklin M. Seller is the best written fantasy I've read in a fanzine in some time.

This is the type of fanzine that would be ideal for you fan writers to get your stories printed in. Why don't you subscribe to it and look it over?

* * *

MOBIUS: no price listed; Ken Beale, 115 East Mosholu Pkwy, Bronx 67, N.Y.. A fanzine most unusual in that it not only has one sheet, but that sheet has only one side. I don't mean it's printed on only one side. I mean it's printed on paper that has only one side. A mobius strip. The contents naturally, don't include any long stories. There's a list of boring stf books, books that should not be classed as fantasy, and though the contents has neither beginning nor end, it repeats itself each time around. Lot's of fun!

* * *

That's all the fanzines for this time, because I'm forced to review them a week early. Mari and I are starting out tomorrow, April 19th, for a long jaunt from New York to California, which will take us through Evanston to see Bill Hamling, Amherst, Wisconsin to visit Ray Palmer; Denver, then Taos to visit Mack Reynolds and other writers in that writing colony, then on to Los Angeles and Laguna Beach.

By the time you read this the trip will be past history. We may be settled someplace like Taos, New Mexico or Prescott, or even Tucson, Arizona.

Meanwhile continue sending all correspondence to me care of the Club House at Ziff-Davis, 366 Madison St., New York, and it will be forwarded to me.

Rog Phillips

The Reader's FORUM



ABOUT THAT METEOR

Dear Editor:

This is my first letter to any mag—stf or otherwise. I doubt that this will be printed because you have probably received many letters about the same subject. The subject to which I am referring was the main topic in your March Observatory. I know that you must have a hard time finding material to put in the Obs. but I think that this material should be checked a little more thoroughly. I must admit, though, that there was only one mis-statement of fact. But many important facts were left out. First of all: From a very good source, I have found that meteoric substances were found at the bottom of one of the craters. Although very little was found, I must believe that this substance was a result of the collision, and not that of some other meteorite because it was found at the bottom of the crater.

The conclusions that you have drawn may still be correct but many more logical ones have been overlooked. Since I was not here at the time of the collision or when the findings of the expedition were announced, because I am only 15 years old, all of this information comes from books and encyclopedias. I have tried to use only books whose information can be relied on.

Here are some facts which were overlooked:

(1) The area in which the object struck is highly inaccessible. The ground is frozen in winter, but thaws and becomes marshy in the summer. Since the object hit the area during the summer, it would naturally penetrate quite a ways.

(2) The object struck in 1908, but the first expedition didn't begin until a Russian named Kulik explored the area in 1930-31. This leaves over 20 years during which the forces of nature would be working on it. In 100 years, no traces will be left at all.

(3) The area is near a very stony river, so many pieces would be mistaken for ordinary stone.

(4) There are more than 10 craters. If said space ship disintegrated in mid air there would naturally be no craters. If said space ship disintegrated after hitting the ground, there would probably be only one crater because the ship would most

likely not break into pieces after hitting the atmosphere.

I have an awful lot more to say, but I have used up a good deal of space already, so I will close here.

Russell L. Mallett
7330 Dibble Ave. N.W.
Seattle 7, Wash.

After Reader Mallett's logical analysis of the facts and evidence regarding the Tungus, meteorite, we'll admit that our certainty that it was actually a space-ship has been badly dented!

—Ed.

FROM A FANZINE EDITOR

Dear Howard:

I'm writing this in regard to an editorial of yours that was recently read to me—the one in which you told of taking a large stack of fanzines and going through them with an eye to finding possible future authors, and finding none.

Ah, what an opening for the old days, when that would have heralded a wave of protest, and the advent of an inky war. But I'm not writing to disagree with you. Not knowing what magazines you went through I can only imagine the inpouring of two months of fanzines to my desk, and look at them...and, I am inclined to agree with you. By far the majority of fanzine writers lack the talent or the ability to write good enough stories to sell. There are, though, magazines that I believe do print material above the average. That these are few, might explain how they did not enter into the stack you tried.

There are also a few fans that I, at least, think do have writing ability. That they write all too seldom is their chief fault.

It is also possible for a merely average fanzine to turn out an issue containing better than average material. That is why I'm sending you a copy of Shangri-La. I would like you to read the articles by Cox and Hershey especially, and the Blackbeard article, though written under pressure, is of interest to fans. I'm not trying to sell these fellows, but merely trying to show that it is possible to have good writing in a fanzine. Or, at least I hope you will think it is good writing.

A great many fanzine writers, myself included, write with an idea. But as our time is limited and not paid for, we do not try to polish the story up to pro-standards. I doubt that there are any fans that consider fanzine material up to pro-zine quality. Yet many of the lads that used to write for fanzines are now selling stories—a couple are even editors!

You said in Portland that AMAZING is the first step for many—from comic or Westerns to science-fiction. Fanzines are also the first step for many of us in a writing career. And just as your writers do not aim too high, lest they shoot over their readers, so do the fans take into consideration the limitations of their reader and their medium.

There is, of course, the possibility that you were only looking to fan fiction, which is admittedly 99% slush. If it was better, you would be getting it submitted in manuscript form.

Guess that's all I have to say. Thanks for letting me take up a little of your time. Best wishes to you and AMAZING.

Rick Sneary
2962 Santa Ana St.
South Gate, Calif.

It was not the writing alone that brought out our comments on the fanzines we read. The plots were largely far too familiar variations on well-worn themes. Unquestionably, fan publications are excellent proving grounds for amateur writers who hope some day to reach the major leagues. But seldom does a story see the light in fanzines that would have made the grade at a paying market. Once a writer turns out a story of that caliber, he usually has the perception to send it to a paying market.

—Ed.

FOR THE BURROUGHS' BOYS

Dear Editor:

I have some books to sell by Edgar Rice Burroughs. I have some very rare ones which are brand new—*The Moon Maid* and *the Mucker*. Others of my rare ones are: *The Mad King*, *The Bandit of Hell's Bend*, *The Cave Girl*, and *Pirates of Venus*. I also have many Tarzan books and Martian books. If you are interested in any book in the series, write me and I will see if I have it.

How about printing some of Burroughs' short stories.

Jack Cohen
78 Avenue C
New York 9, N.Y.

NOT FOR THE U. S.

Dear Mr. Browne:

I understand that foreign readers of science-fiction have a difficult time securing issues of AMAZING STORIES. As a dyed-in-the-wool science fiction fan, I realize what a disappointment this can be.

I have several back issues of AMAZING, FANTASTIC ADVENTURES, etc. which

I will be glad to exchange with any foreign s-f fan for English science-fiction or what-have-you. No U.S. readers need apply as they have the neighborhood news-stand.

James R. Harris
Kayford, W. Va.

HAPPY MEDIUM

Dear Ed,

I've been reading SF mags for quite a while and believe me I have enjoyed every ish, especially those of AMAZING. I find your mag has everything a true SF reader wants: good entertaining stories. They are not too commonplace nor are they too fantastic. It seems you have struck a wonderful medium, seeing as it is so hard to please everyone.

So far so good, but what of the covers? It seems not too far fetched to ask for a happy medium there. I hate to buy a book (I consider your publication more than a pulp mag) that has the nudes or semi-nudes. I have been keeping up with the letter column and I see you have improved the covers greatly, too much in fact. I don't mind seeing a pretty face (or body) on a cover, just try to keep away from the extremes.

So much for the outside, now for the inside. What more can I say that I haven't already said? Well, the shorts. That is the short shorts. I use these for a warmup to good reading. At the risk of being vague, I say they are optional. I know they are good space fillers and they often help out the ed. in planning the book, thus far OK but no more than that.

The reader's column should be lengthened. Heck, that's the best part of the mag.

This is my first letter, but I hope not the last. Thanks for hearing me out.

S. Bernstein
3929 McFarlin
Dallas, Texas

The cover controversy has ended, with enough votes in to help us determine the course to follow to please the majority of our readers. In a word, the decision came out "variety." If readers will glance back through their files at the last six issues, they'll discover that variety is exactly what they're getting... In the August issue of Amazing Stories we ran a full fourteen pages of letters!

—Ed.

BUSTED: ONE RECORD!

Dear Sir:

This is just another one of my letters to you, and I don't expect it to be printed, for it would break my record, as I've written for years and have never had one printed, but I sorta hope that you will print it for I want to get out to the true SF fans who are collectors.

I know that they will all agree with me that your twins are among the best in SF

and that they were the first, and they have set a pace that the others will always have a hard time matching. But my pet peeve is this: I'm a collector and I have saved SF mags since 1934, and it's hard to keep them when you have to make your bookcases with 4 or 5 different height bookshelves.

What I want to see is you people get together and get one size for all SF mags. As it is, both your mags are the old large size. RAP's are the new $5\frac{1}{2} \times 7\frac{1}{2}$ —so is JWC Jr's ASF. And then GALAXY is another size. So my plea is this, please, kind sirs, will all you boys get together and really hash this thing out. I know a few collectors who want to save your mags, but they don't because they are so large. I'm sure it won't hurt your fine work, and that you won't have to cut out any of the little parts.

I would like to see how many others feel like I do, and I would like to get letters from any other fans who have more than a casual interest in Atlantis, Lemuria, Mu, and all other ancient history. Or those who are interested in flying saucers or Esperanto or just plain fan mail friends.

I would especially like to hear from all who study the Maya's, Egyptians and Atlantis, as I'm trying to ready an item on Atlantis and Egypt. All those interested, please write.

As for the stories in your mags, what can I say: they are tops along with the authors and artists. I have no beefs (except size) and I'm sure you will keep up your high standards without my telling you.

Robert W. Parr
3324 E. Van Buren
Phoenix, Arizona

Each editor will tell you the size of his magazine is the right one and helps to sell it. With that kind of attitude, uniformity is impossible. —Ed.

ARLINE TELLS ALL:

Dear Mr. Browne:

I want to say, first of all, thank you: thank you for putting in a section telling about the authors whose work appears in each issue. Maybe people are nosy, but everyone likes to know about the lives of famous writers, politicians, and actors (for an example, note the high sales of movie mags). And to have it written by the author himself! Don't stop, or I can see where you will begin getting cards from your 240,000 readers (re one of your advertisements) berating you. Thanks, thanks, thanks. (That's also a good use for the inside front cover besides advertising false teeth).

As for your editorial, well in spite of the fact that I have been trying to partially erase the word from my jargon, all I can say for it is, that it is cute with a Capital C. All during the first portion of study hall, my girl friend and I laughed over it.

Say, I just had a thought; why don't you continue that list in one of the spaces you use for the short scientific articles. It would get laughs and people *do* like to laugh. (By the way, one of the things you forgot to mention there was the Space Patrol, or Galaxy Patrol, and also to define the hero and heroine of a s-f story. Or is that too hard?)

And now for the stories:

"Who Sows The Wind"—Something has happened to Rog Phillips. Usually, it was a foregone conclusion that one of his stories would be the best in the entire issue, especially if it was a novel. But well, his short stories have all been terrific, excellent and super, but his long novels have deteriorated in quality. "Who Sows the Wind" was very good, and as far as it went was written very well, but... There was a sense of something missing all through. Are you sure several pages weren't lost in the mails. He brings up the theory of the bed of civilization being the Arctic and all the rest, and then drops it like last year's pash. However, the characters in it behaved humanly enough, insofar as that went. Perhaps, it was just the science fiction point that was lacking, in spite of the background sketched in. Oh well. (By the way, Phillips ought to be able to do a very good novel for FA on the Arctic as a cradle for civilization and all that stuff mentioned. With a writer of his caliber you might have a classic on your hands).

"The Two-Timer"—New idea at least. Liked the ending.

"We'll Get You Yet"—seems like it would have been more at home in FA, but it was rather good.

"Nuisance Value"—Very, very good, though I did figure out what the trouble was after reading the place was perfect. Very well written, and perfect length. About No. 3.

"Flight to Dishonor"—Seems cut in half. After that, n.c.

"The Imitators"—At last, a new idea. This was just about number one on my list. It had everything, namely a new idea, suspense, action, enough to keep it from being boring yet not too much, and at the same time there was a real "gimmick" ending.

I now reach the letters; I have the highest praise for those who considered "No Medal for Captain Manning" wonderful, and pity for those who disliked it. I know that when I got the issue, I read the story through in my English class.

Now as to Mr. Calvin Thomas Beck. Just what is wrong with those of us in the fourteen to sixteen age brackets? Simple question. Our reading tastes are not too low, I believe. Somehow or other, I find more teens reading the books like "The Wall" for example, than I did adults, and somehow or other, in our school required reading, we seem to find the great classics (Julius Caesar, David Copperfield, Ivanhoe, etc.) that so many of the adults have not read. Science-fiction has not been writ-

ten up to the level of Einstein; it has merely grown naturally, and in due time it will find its proper level. The teen who reads s-f is naturally able to understand it, whatever this may have to do with his intelligence.

Most of the readers of AS seem to be adults, so it seems to be a reasonably safe assumption that the editors buy material suited for mature, adult reading. Having us teens read AS may merely stand to prove that there is not that much of a difference between the understanding of a teen-ager and an adult in his twenties. The basic differences seem to be in emotional age, and somehow, I never heard of thinking with the emotions. So please, hands off us teens. We can bite.

Before I close I just want to ask you, please! No serials. Around when I first started reading science-fiction I read some serial in FA, and it was so good I just had to read the first part of it. It took me about a month or two before I finally found the preceding issue in a friend's attic, and then I had to hunt up the ending, having forgotten it. Incidentally, this story was about 60,000 words and could have been put in a single issue, and still have had room for a few shorts. It was, thank the lord, the last serial I saw in either FA or AS. I might as well say this, that in spite of all the brickbats handed AS by yours truly, I think you put out a swell mag, one that I never hesitate to recommend.

Incidentally, does anybody know where I can get hold of the copy of AMAZING from somewhere in Jan. 1949 or 50) that had as its lead novel, "We Dance for the Dom" and in it, "City of the Dead"? Also the issue of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES which has Roger Phillips' "The Involuntary Immortals"? It was December 1948 or '49 I think.

Arline Gingold
60 Elm Street
Ellenville, N. Y.

THE CLOCK WATCHER

Dear Editor:

After reading the pros and cons of the other readers as to the cover situation I am about to add my two cents worth.

I believe that some of the feminine readers must be jealous of the covers because the girls there portrayed have such faces and figures that they would like to own.

All in all, American women are among the most beautiful in the world, but at the beaches I've seen some whose faces and figures would stop the clocks.

After all, the cover girls on your mag are no worse (in fact, some are better) than those found on the numerous bathing beaches.

I myself enjoy the covers but I enjoy the contents much more. I enjoyed all stories in this May issue. I enjoyed reading the Forum except for a couple of letters that I would tell the writers what to do with if I could do so. Mr. Maloy's, Mrs.

Welch's, and Mr. Newlin's letters I enjoyed reading as they expressed some of my sentiments, too.

William Henrichs
1315 East DeSoto
Pensacola, Fla.

Women are here to stay—and men are here to stay with them! Based on that ponderous observation, the ladies will continue to land on our covers at regular (but not monotonous) intervals. Okay?

—Ed.

BOUGHT AND SOLD

Dear Mr. Browne:

I have a number of back issues of science fiction magazines, including copies of AMAZING and FANTASTIC ADVENTURES for sale. Readers interested can obtain a complete list by dropping me a post card.

I'm also interested in buying some back numbers, so anyone who has copies to dispose of might send me a list of magazines and prices asked.

Gerry de la Ree
277 Howland Avenue
River Edge, N.J.

THE WRONG PEW—BUT THE RIGHT CHURCH?

Dear Sir:

I am 60 years old and I read a copy of the first issue of AMAZING STORIES. I have been reading it for many years, but for several of the past months I quit buying it because the stories it contained were full of wise cracks and gibberish and worthless. But Saturday I picked up the May issue and looked at the picture on the front cover and "The Planet of no Return." Well it was like finding an old friend. It was good. Real good. You are learning fast, Mr. Editor. But I still think you are in the wrong pew and wasting your talents—talents that rank with the best. "Tharn" and "The Return of Tharn"—these were real good and I would love to read another long story about Tharn and the Cro-Magnon people.

You say in the Reader's Forum that the Shaver stories were no longer popular. Where in the blue blazes do you get that? While Shaver stories were appearing in AMAZING STORIES, they were snapped up as soon as they hit the stands. Shaver's "I Remember Lemuria" is the best science fiction story ever published in AS. "The Witch Queen's Cult", "Sathanas"—they were all good. Shaver could still be writing about Mutanman and other worlds. It is a shame they stopped. However, I suspect Shaver soured on a certain kind of religion. Well I believe in some religious teaching—some I don't believe. Who should care? Anything can happen in fiction. Anyway I think the do-goods got Shaver instead of the Deroes. It is this way: Old men with cramped hands and stiff fingers

don't like to write, or you would hear a lot of them say they want more Shaver stories.

How about some pictures from the giant two hundred inch telescope—pictures of other worlds. Pictures of rockets and science machine gadgets and even flying saucers.

Tell those that want sex pictures to go to the sex magazines and not ruin the grand old AS—which we have enjoyed for many years.

Earl Sayre
Elmwood, W. Va.

Even without the blue blazes Reader Sayre mentions, our statement regarding the Shaver mystery was true and must stand. —Ed.

SOME CHANGE IS RIGHT!

Dear Editor,

I've been an AMAZING STORIES fan for quite a few years now, but lately it seems that I can't buy a magazine without letters dealing with the pros and cons on sexy covers.

The one that really burned me up was the letter from Ian Macauley in the June Issue. Does he seem to think that AMAZING's so bad that you couldn't sell it unless you "have something on the cover to make it interesting?"

AMAZING is one of the finest science-fiction mags on the mart. Lately the art work on the covers has been very good, depicting actual scenes in the lead stories. Some of the art work on the covers before gave me the impression that the artists read the title of the story and that was as far as he got—the covers (on second see) had very little to do with the stories.

In answer to the question of more sex on the covers, I'd like to say that I'm in favor of it so long as it has something to do with the stories. Why clad the males from head to foot in space suits and helmets and have the women practically naked? Is it because the women are superior in resisting the elements, space, or the atmosphere of a planet than the males—or is it because you think so little of your magazine? If you have to have sex on the covers, why not also include naked men as well? It would certainly be some change.

Ethel M. David
340 Summit Avenue
Schenectady, N. Y.

If it's all the same to you, Ethel, we'll keep the men covered up! A vista of bony knees and knobby angles instead of curves would pull down on our heads the kind of wrathful indignation no human could survive! —Ed.

APPEASERS DIE YOUNG!

Dear Mr. Browne:

With the recent upsurge in popularity

of stf the various (and many) prozines have found it necessary to re-groom themselves to be able to compete with the other prozines. This is evidenced by the recent changes in format of several magazines.

Now, what I want to ask is this: When is AS going to make the leap? Oh, I know you've been telling us that the Korean situation makes this impractical. However, this is dodging the issue. And, along the same line, if it is impractical, why have so many other mags already made the change? Maybe your circulation does not warrant the change. Or perhaps the boys in the front office won't play ball. On the other hand, you might not have any intention of going slick but simply want to "appease" the fans by telling them you do.

Personally, for once, I'd like to hear something besides buck passing.

On a pleasanter note: Rog Phillips seems to have a habit of constantly producing excellent stories. "Who Sows The Wind," in my opinion, was the best effort of his since the "Matrix" stories. Since I haven't read the rest of the stories, I cannot rate them. A couple of them look promising.

Your covers are definitely on the upgrade. But a WHEEL to steer a spaceship!!

Jan Romanoff
26601 So. Western
Lomita, California

You ask for a straight answer, Jon—and here it is. First, Amazing Stories leads all other science fiction magazines in circulation, so any change or lack of change in format has nothing to do with that point. Second, changes in format are not because s-f is gaining in popularity; such changes are made in hopes of getting readers to pick up one magazine instead of another. Third, publishing costs and paper prices are almost out of sight, making impractical the kind of changes that really matter in the opinion of readers... We don't appease and we don't pass the buck; to our way of thinking, readers buy a magazine for entertainment and nothing else. No matter how you dress up a magazine, it stands or falls on the stories it presents—and Amazing Stories stands like the Rock of Gibraltar! —Ed.

IT'S COLD OUT THERE!

Dear Mr. Browne:

I have just finished reading the Reader's Forum of the June issue, and I feel that I just must make some remarks to certain readers and to you (I mean the magazine, of course).

In reference to Ian T. Macauley's letter about telling people where they should get off. I'm going to tell him where to get off. Mr. Macauley, it seems to me that you have somewhat of a lewd fascination for nude girls, and you don't like people to say that they shouldn't be on the covers. About that, I don't care. But when they start with the damsel in distress, dressed

in panties and a bra, in the chilliness of outer space or on the bleak, barren wastes of a planet, planetoid, or asteroid, that's just too much for me to stomach! I don't know whether you get the TV program "Space Cadet" down in Atlanta, Georgia, but here's what Cadet Manning would probably say, "Wise up, Junior, wise up!"

To C. A. Parker, Essex, England: Over there, the population may like serials, but here the majority doesn't. In other words, "We don't want them, you can have them, they're no good to us!"

In closing, I'll say just this, if there were such a thing as ultimate perfection in a magazine, you'd be the first to have it. As it is now, you're mighty close to it.

Harry Belsky
2603 North Napa Street
Philadelphia 32, Pennsylvania

FUNNY PLACE FOR THE BREAD!

Dear H.B.

Every time I find a letter in the Reader's Forum criticizing your choice of stories, artists or their work, uncut pages, ad infinitum, it makes me boil!

I read AS and FA because I enjoy them and if there are some stories that disappoint me, so what? I'm not perfect and don't expect perfection in others. As for not reading a story because the first page was dull or something, bah! Some of the stories I liked best started out in quite an ordinary manner, built up to real pleasure. After all, how many of us make a sandwich with the bread in the middle?

Your covers have been exceptionally good in 1951. I'm not ashamed to have anyone see me with them and I haunt my dealer till I get AS and FA in my hands each month.

Incidentally, I really get my money's worth out of your magazines. When I finish them I send them to my father-in-law who is a CWO in the USAAF stationed in Tokyo and he passes them on to the men in his band. So they are really well read and rightly so.

My husband never would read sf until the covers began to intrigue him so he couldn't resist!

A toast to the best science-fiction.

Mrs. C. L. Salin
Lakeport, California

Without being overly smug about it, Mrs. Salin, we're inclined to agree with you that Amazing's covers this year have been the best ever to grace the outside of The Old Aristocrat. And coming as soon as some that are even better! —Ed.

MEMO TO NEWLIN: USE MORE DELICACY

Dear Editor:

I am writing this as a part time sf reader so none of what I say can be considered authentic. I think that of all the sf mags I do read which are of a very

great variety, AMAZING is the best from cover to cover. There are of course criticisms, but what bit of reading matter of any category escapes a chance for honest criticism?

As I read through the letters to the editor section of the May issue, I certainly was jarred at the narrow-mindedness of some people. First of all, if they do not think this magazine is morally correct, why do they clutter their minds and empty their pockets on this sort of "trash"? Don't misinterpret that as my opinion of your type of magazine, to me nothing is that nasty word unless the reader has a nasty mind and therefore guiltily calls what he is reading "trash."

Now before I say anything else, I'd like to mention that I agree with Earl Newlin of his extremely extreme opinion of housewives who read sf, and their broods but I certainly think he could have expressed himself in a more delicate manner. As I am planning on being a housewife who reads sf myself one of these days, I can put myself in their place for just a second and feel that I would probably sue him for slander or something. (I'm still your friend, Earl.)

I can only think of one criticism of your May issue and that is that most of the stories were basically identical. For instance, "Planet of No Return," "Ride That Stardust Trail", and "Voyage of the Sitting Duck" all involve a similar plot of hero or heroine left or marooned on a strange planet with their lover, only each one is "seasoned" differently. Sort of like a tennis ball, a football, and a baseball all heading in the same direction. That's rather puny a comparison, but it sort of carries my point.

May I conclude with the statement that I enjoyed every story thoroughly despite the criticism, but will be looking for more variety in ideas.

Sandi Pierson
1492 Westdale Rd.
South Euclid, Ohio

19,998 TO GO....

Dear Mr. Browne:

I finished the June issue several days ago, but this is the first chance I've had to sit down and give you the immeasurable benefit of my opinions. The top three stories in order of my preference were as follows:

"Who Sows the Wind" by Rog Phillips
"Flight to Dishonor" by Gerald Vance
"The Imitators" by Peter Worth.

The Clubhouse article was quite good this month, and the Forum was better than average.

But now may I insert the ever recurrent gripe again? Aren't there any writers turning out *good long* novels today? Possibly I should have said good as well as long. I am in complete agreement with Mrs. Cunningham whose letter led off the Forum this month on the length of stories. If it's not good enough to be a novel, by all means let it be a short or even a short,

short, but doggone it, if it's a good plot, give it the treatment it deserves, the space it needs, and, yes, even run it as a serial if need be.

To more pleasant things, the cover was a wonderful change, no nekkit wimmin, not even a bem. First thing I did when I opened the mag was turn to the index page, but no...still says Mr. Herman Bolin is Art Director. Maybe he was on vacation?? Congratulations in any event.

Re Bob Silverberg's request for another "Man From Yesterday" you now need only 19,998 votes before beginning for labors.

Henry Burwell, Jr.
459 Sterling St. N.E.
Atlanta, Georgia

Long novels vs. more stories per issue—that's the new discussion shaping up in letters from readers. As with the cover controversy, we're sitting here ready to tabulate the votes and act accordingly. Speak up, folks—loudly and at length.

—Ed.

MRS. GREENE SEES RED!

Dear Mr. Browne,

It's very seldom I ever write to a Reader's Forum but I would like to tell Name Withheld how mistaken she is. It's not AMAZING STORIES that needs cleaning up—it's her mind that needs cleaning up. I've always heard it's the most evil minded people that are ready to cast the first stone at other people.

I've yet to see any "sex stimulating passages" in AMAZING or FANTASTIC ADVENTURES. Now if she was talking about some of the best sellers or love stories that are on the newsstands, I would agree with the woman. And if she doesn't like your magazine there is no law compelling her to buy it.

Personally, I've always enjoyed your covers, beautiful gals, and I don't see any thing vulgar about them, nor was I ashamed to let my boys see them. I know they're not dirty minded like some people.

Congrats: To Rog Phillips. His story "Time Trap" is appearing in our daily newspaper "Ashland Daily Independent." I like his stories very much.

For goodness sakes, let's leave the household hints to the "Ladies' Home Journal" (which I like very much) and if my four boys and one girl will always read as clean a magazine as AMAZING, I'll be satisfied. So far they read comic books and books from our library.

I've read many a book, good and bad, clean and otherwise, in every field from Detective to Love Stories to the Reader's Digest, but when people start casting stones at AMAZING STORIES it makes me mad.

Mrs. J. H. Greene
408 Greenup Avenue
Ashland, Ky.

Atta girl!

—Ed.

PERSONAL TO MRS. WELCH

Dear Editor:

All the stories in the May issue of AMAZING were wonderful, but I am not going to comment on them. In the Reader's Page there has been a great controversy going on about whether or not there should be sexy covers, and in this issue I noticed a large abundance of letters regarding the above, and read them with only casual interest until I came to a missive by a Mrs. Gaylord Welch. Mrs. Welch quite emphatically states that, "I wouldn't even buy AS and FA if it weren't for the women on the covers and/or in the stories." Now I'll admit that sexual interest and appeal are necessary in a story, for where there is a hero, there should, in fact, must be a heroine. But if Mrs. Welch would not read your fine magazines without girls on the covers, she certainly is not a science fiction fan, for it is the stories that matter, not the illustrations or the girls in them. Perhaps Mrs. Welch was just trying to make her argument stronger, and did not realize that what she was saying was that she would prefer the s in s-f to mean sex, not science. I am quite sure that Mrs. Welch sees her mistake in the way she worded those few lines, and if she didn't, I'm very sorry.

Robert Dennis McNamara
50 Plaza Street
Brooklyn 17, N.Y.

We felt at the time that Mrs. Welch was being overly emphatic for the purposes of making her point clear. She certainly succeeded—and we're willing to bet she'll continue to read AS and FA no matter what we put on the cover.

—Ed.

WHAT'S HAPPENED TO GEIER?

Dear Editor:

With the exception of a period of two years (1949-1950) when the entry of AMAZING STORIES was restricted from entry into Canada by Canadian Government Regulations, I have been a constant reader of your magazine and enjoy it very much, especially since the Shaver Mystery has been eliminated. I am sure that most of the readers will agree that the so-called Mystery was becoming quite boring. Incidentally, a Shaver fan in Detroit has assured me that I would never have a letter published in AMAZING STORIES.

It would be appreciated if you'd inform me as to what has happened to Chester Geier; I used to enjoy his stories so much and have not seen any of his stories in recent editions of the magazine.

I have an AMAZING STORIES edition published in 1929 given to me by my father who was an ardent reader of the magazine and I guess I follow in his footsteps. He tells me that the magazine was first published in 1924 and was edited by Hugo Gernsback in 1929. In the 1929 edition, I noticed a story by Alexander Phillips and am interested to know if he is related to

Rog Phillips who is one of my favorite authors. AMAZING STORIES has come a long way since 1924 and in my humble opinion has now reached the top.

In the June edition "Planet of No Return" by Lawrence Chandler was most enjoyable and I considered "Vampire of the Deep" by Rog Phillips a masterpiece.

As I have quite a bit of time on my hands I would be interested in corresponding with other AMAZING STORIES readers.

Eraina K. Collins
151 Brunswick Street
Halifax, Nova Scotia,
Canada

As it must to all writers, Chet Geier hit a rocky stretch in the trail where putting words on paper suddenly became a job greater than the labors of Hercules. But he's licked it now, and you'll soon be seeing many stories of the top quality he's stood for so long.... So far as we know, Rog and Alexander Phillips are not related. —Ed.

WRITE 'EM RIGHT!

Dear Mr. Browne:

I sit down at this writing, with little or nothing to say, but I must keep up the tradition, mustn't I? It is my opinion that "Men Behind Amazing Stories" was an excellent idea, and you will continue it in future issues. How about one by you, HB.

And gadzooks, let us see some more of those daffy definitions of s-f words. I can't help laughing every time I think of that bit about Disintegrating Rays. Atkins' cartoon was cute, but haven't we seen it someplace before?

Rog Phillips' novel was good reading, but my writing instructor gave me a bawling out for creating a plot that made Russia the antagonist. She told me that Russia could be hinted at, but the country would have to be a fictitious one. Even so, the story was pretty good, but the conflict—it was hardly that—being just the country vs. country idea, with a little space travel thrown in. Of course, the skillful handling made up for the plot.

"We'll Get You Yet" was a swell story but 15,000 words, yet. Now I would say that if the aliens were to try to eliminate Jerry, and destroy his file on the things then we would have a super story. J.D. MacDonald would make a lovely job of such a yarn, I'm sure.

"Flight to Dishonor" was the best of all the shorts, being well plotted, with an excellent climax. I only wish that someone would suggest a few plots to me, that would make yarns of equal climax.

"The Imitators" was interesting, but wasn't finished, from my point of view. The ending suggested that the author had a great desire to get on to something more

interesting so finished that one quickly. The jellymonsters were intelligent creatures and would surely have been able to comprehend, if Mr. Holmes had told them of the perilous danger that they were creating. Near the end of the story, it struck me that the cylinders in the underground cavern, were space ships, and that the jellymonsters were planning to return to some other solar system from whence they originated, and destroy Andronia, all because of the hostility they found in the Earth men. It may have made a better ending, wot?

Your Reader's Forum was punk this month, being filled with nothing but a stack of letters that either argued about trite, worn out subjects, or said absolutely nothing, in so many words (the way this letter does, for example). The only letter that was interesting was that of William Bucci, and that because of the fact that I would like to complete my collection of mags. I have only a few of 1950's mags that have covers on them, and anything before that is hopelessly in tatters. I like covers on my mags, and will be a perfect sucker to any of such.

I like trimmed edges, too, and so with a razor blade, and a straight edge, and after cutting my fingers a few times and developing a blister on my finger, I trimmed the edges of my own mags. The straight edge, being of wood, is no longer straight.

Robert Marlow
Invermere, B. C.

MISSING STORY

Dear Editor,

I noticed in your issue no. 7 of AMAZING STORIES, in the letter section several references to a story called "Seven Came Back" which they said appeared in issue no. 5 of AS (containing the stories "Weapon from the Stars", etc.). I would like to point out that no such story appeared in the British issue of the said magazine. As the British publishers claim the British edition of AS is printed and published in U. K. exactly as it appears in the USA. I would like to know if this story got lost.

I have only been reading s-f for a few months, but have become an ardent fan of this type of fiction and in my humble opinion AS and FA are the best mags in this field. Regarding the controversy over your covers, let's have a few nudes but not too many. Variety is the spice of life.

Angus Wolsterholme
366 New Hall Lane
Preston, Lancashire
England

Not missing; simply not enough room. —Ed.

Many readers have complained that their favorite newsstand is sold out of **Amazing Stories** before they can buy a copy. If this has happened to you, please advise us!

LOOK INSIDE... AND SAVE YOUR LIFE!

BY

L. A. BURT

HAS IT ever occurred to you that almost everything made, with few exceptions, is many times stronger than it need be? Practically all vehicles, machines, tools, equipment—all gadgetry is constructed of materials much stronger than is really necessary. Why is this?

The answer is quite simple. There may be slight defects in the materials composing the equipment. The manufacturer can't take a chance—for safety's sake he makes the thing stronger than necessary and the result is that there are few failures. "Put in a safety factor of four or five" he tells his designers, and they do; a highly laudable custom. And also a highly inefficient and expensive one.

Today and in the near future, this practice will cease or certainly decrease greatly primarily because there are many ways of testing materials without destroying them: Magnetic methods, sonic methods, X-rays and others. Using these systems, a manufacturer can be absolutely sure that his product is perfect to do the job. Then he need not be so wasteful in introducing large safety factors. He can use a safety factor of "one"—that is, just enough.

The testing of things by sonic methods

and X-ray is becoming standard practice. A steel bar comes in, is X-rayed, found to have a flaw and rejected. Only enough metal is used then, sound metal that is, to do the job. In aircraft, for example, nearly every single component is thoroughly tested with the result that light-weight construction can be as strong as massive steel work. It is becoming necessary to conserve materials. This will be more true in the future. Consequently testing methods will be used lavishly. Every nut and bolt, every rivet, every beam, every channel will be examined in detail and no defective materials will be employed at all. Items will be designed to within fractions of their ultimate limits and no unnecessary safety factors—which in many cases are really waste factors—will be needed.

In this way the future, which is so promising in terms of what it will bring in new things, new tools, will not be economically exhausting. We will not fritter away our strength on non-essentials, but instead will concentrate it. The image of a flaw on an oscilloscope screen is a lot nicer to look at than a cracked girder or a chipped gear—especially when you're in the helicopter built of them!

THE SECRET EVERYBODY KNOWS!

BY

RALPH COX

IN SPITE of the fact that the Atomic Energy Commission maintains the utmost secrecy about anything concerning atomic bombs, the minute an atom bomb test is made, the Soviets are preparing to study it! Naturally no Russian agents are permitted near the testing grounds in Nevada and New Mexico. How then, can they tell anything about the bombs?

Each time an atomic bomb has been exploded the Russians have learned what type of bomb it was—plutonium, or uranium—roughly how big it was and numerous other pertinent facts. Was this due to their spy system?

In a way it was, but the spy system was one common to all men—it was a spy system of scientific instruments and skilled judgments. When a bomb is exploded, it throws into the air a vast cloud of radio-active particles and these particles are driven by wind currents all over the world. The Russians maintain planes equipped with Geiger counters and cloud chambers and from a study of the radio-active products which drift over their lands at high altitudes, they can almost reconstruct in detail the action which preceded

the cloud. Seismographs give further information.

So the Russians have a pretty good picture of exactly what we have done in atomic energy work. But the system works both ways. We too, know exactly what the Russians have done in this field. Our planes and instruments can tell even better because we can locate ourselves much nearer Russian territory than they can locate themselves near our lands. We know exactly how many and what type of atomic bombs the Russians have test-exploded. We know how powerful they were. We've traced their atomic clouds all over the Earth.

There is the possibility that the Soviets may have secret stations much closer to the U. S. than we suspect. These might masquerade as cosmic ray stations or some similar innocuous organization. Really it is not important, since atomic knowledge has become such common property thanks to traitorous spies and, unfortunately, competent Russian research. Nevertheless, our tradition of a free science is much more powerful in the end than one fettered by Russian might.

WHEN THE WORLD WENT BLACK

AN

"AMAZING" VIGNETTE

BY

SALEM LANE

"DO YOU want more of the soup, John?" Louise asked, her hand poised on the ladle.

"I'll have a little more, dear," he answered. But he wasn't really listening. He was thinking how well the planting had come through. Next year he hoped to put in wheat. Next year...

He glanced around the crude wooden cabin, very near to a log-cabin. He asked himself a thousand times what miracle had caused him to be vacationing with Louise when the bombs fell. That had been four years ago and there were no cities and very few people like themselves, fortunate to survive, fortunate not to have been radiation-exposures. Yet he and Louise were still childless and more and more the fear struck him that somehow they'd been touched by the paralysis which had struck down the world.

"John," Louise broke in on his thoughts, "I've been wondering. Can't we run into the city soon? The radiation must be dying down by now."

"No," he answered patiently as if he'd explained this a hundred times before. "It must have been cobalt," he said, "and I'm sure it's not safe. We'll wait. Jackson thinks the same way." Jackson and his wife were two more fortunate who hadn't been touched.

Louise pattered around the simple wood-burning stove. John's gaze lingered on the useless rifle standing against the wall. It would be nice to go into the city. He'd be able to get cartridges for it then. The bow standing beside it though wasn't a bad substitute at that. He thought proudly of the animals he'd brought down with it. He shuddered slightly when he thought also of the other animal—the mutant.

Suddenly he heard Louise shriek and he looked up. At the window a face was peering in and though he glimpsed it only momentarily he knew exactly what it was. There was a Mutie outside!

He dove for the bow and the wall and the simple quiver of arrows beside it. Besides his knife it was his only weapon. Frightened, Louise elung to his arm. Gently John freed himself and stood waiting in front of the door. Certainly the monster outside would make an effort to enter. He hoped that there was only one.

And of course it happened. The wooden latch lifted. The door swung open slowly and the Thing stood there facing them. It had been human once. Even under the ketoid sear tissue that covered its naked hulk from head to toe, the humanness was recognizable. The radiation sickness had not hurt its metabolism though for it stood a good six feet tall even though it was bent with its characteristic stoop. Its arms hung at its side and from the gash of a mouth, unrecognizable sounds issued.

John fitted the nock of an arrow to the string of the bow, poised to draw and fire. "Go away," he said desperately. "We can't help you." He knew the words meant nothing to the thing in front of them. He felt Louise's trembling beside him. He was torn between pity and disgust. This thing had once been a man like himself. But the radiation had changed it completely and some subtle something in its makeup refused to allow it to die. From starvation it had turned into a cannibalistic ghoul, its mental processes non-existent.

John took hold of himself. "Don't look, Louise," he said dispassionately. "I'm going to kill it."

It was mere coincidence that caused the creature to hurl itself toward them, crouched at the opposite wall. He could not have understood the words. The powerful arms extended, it hurled itself into the room. This was food. That was its one motivating factor.

Even as the creature moved John's arms flashed up and the bowstring came back. The vibratory sound of the released bowstring filled the room momentarily and the creature stopped in its tracks staring stupidly at the crudely feathered shaft buried half its length in its chest. A gurgling sound came from its mouth and it sank to the floor—dead.

"Oh John," Louise whispered in mingled relief and horror at the necessity of the deed. John swallowed. I am an atavar, he thought, defending my mate. The silliness of the thought struck him—but this is nineteen eighty. He threw back his head and laughed—but there was no humor in it. He held Louise tightly in his arms. "This is nineteen eighty," he whispered against her hair, "we must live..."

WHEN SWAC MEETS GREEK

BY

MILTON MATTHEW

AT THE Bureau of Standards in Washington, a little known calculating machine is in full speed and operation. But this machine is a little different. It is not concerned with numbers or mathematical symbols. It is not designed to serve the world of physics except indirectly. It is much closer to human activity than that. It is a symbol-handling machine, but one much more nearly akin to the human being—the symbols it deals with are words! "Swac" is its name.

Using memory drums and wire tapes, vocabularies of the English language and some foreign one—German was first tried, now Russian—a correspondence is set up and the machine can translate rudimentary passages from one language to another working either way. Some success is reported with the instrument but unfortunately a good deal more is going to have to be done before the details can be ironed out.

Translation of languages—especially by machine—is one of the toughest technical problems today. It is not simply a matter of matching words, or substituting the Russian word for the English one. It is much more subtle and complicated than that. First, there are grammatical prob-

lems involving word endings, word order and a host of other details. In addition, a thousand shades of meaning and subtle nuances surround each word or phrase and these are untranslatable *per se*.

People who translate documents are familiar with the booby traps of language. It is so easy to make an error. If you doubt this, some time examine foreign printings of advertising matter or instructional material. If the translators have not been first rate, as is often the case, the reading is humorous where it was intended to be serious and vice versa.

If translators have this problem, how shall it be conquered by unthinking machines, no matter how cleverly designed? The solution while difficult, is not impossible. Scanning techniques and correlating methods will give all possible shades of meaning to phrases, and selection can be made. The technicians recognize the difficulties but are not deterred by any means. They know that they can be solved. Before electronic brains are developed into direct translators, however, it is probable that a voice-to-printed-word machine will have to be developed. This intermediate step will undoubtedly be the real answer.

★ ★ ★

ONE
+
ONE
= ONE

PLANCK'S famous quantum theory which is the basis of all modern physics (along with Relativity) may not yet be the last word on the side of fact. Albert Einstein has recently called the theory before the bar of reason and in some respects found it wanting. He suggests that in spite of its being an incredible triumph of human reasoning, it probably is not the final picture of things as they are.

The quantum theory, of course, demonstrated the discreteness of radiation, showed that energy (radiant) was made up of corpuscular amounts, tiny "quanta" which traveled in bullet-like fashion. While in direct disagreement with the old light-wave theory of Newton, the quantum theory so accurately described many phenomena which Newton's couldn't, that it had to be accepted. And to top it off, the quantum theory had to be blended with the wave theory to give a dual picture of energy! For decades this plurality baffled scientists until they realized that radiant energy simply partakes of both the nature of waves and of particles and

that the two had to be reconciled since one theory alone wouldn't work. The major triumph was, of course, that the quantum theory along with waves has worked perfectly and has enabled physicists to probe into matter with confidence. The atomic bomb is one consequence of this theory.

It has become so well accepted that we think of it as fact, though Einstein's recent review will undoubtedly cause much re-consideration. Somehow, Dr. Einstein suggests that a complete revision of attitude and theory is going to have to be made and that in the final analysis it will be found that the quantum-wave theory will not satisfactorily explain the nature of radiant energy. Until this time comes, naturally, the quantum-wave theory will be used—and it will deliver the goods. It will be very interesting, though, to see what the future holds. What conceivable picture of radiation can be drawn? Will it be something so abstruse we'll hardly be able to imagine it or will it be so simple that quantum theory will look complex in comparison? —G. Lasher

HOW OLD IS YOUR HEAD? BY TOM LYNCH

NATURALLY no one knows for sure the extent of man's habitation of the earth. It has been believed that during the long, slow evolutionary stages in his development he has been here hundreds of thousands of years. Even the development of his brain has been assumed to have been an extremely slow and tedious process, beginning with the emergence of a suitable brain-case.

Recently it has been suggested that possibly the emergence of the brain may have been a surprisingly rapid occurrence taking place no more than fifty thousand years ago! This theory emanates from a physiologist who has been working on the alteration of rats' heads. By a process similar to mutation, he suggests that man's brain may have come into full development extremely rapidly. Gene changes needed to produce the altered head and brain structure may be few. Bony structures may change just as rapidly. Since there is no way of proving this it can only remain a hypothesis. But to a certain extent it checks well with recent radioactive checks on the ages of bones of ancient men. Men may not have been occupying the planet as long as they like to think. In fact, we may be relative newcomers!

VOICES FROM THE VOID BY E. BRUCE YACHES

THE LAYING OF the trans-Atlantic cable back in the last half of the nineteenth century was a technical accomplishment of the first order. It linked Europe and America with the oh-so-faint—but positive—clicks of the telegraph relay. In a way, it is a marvel that it worked at all, for by the time the electric impulse had traveled across thousands of miles of cable, it was so weak as to be almost undetectable. In those days there were no vacuum tube amplifiers.

To show how much progress in cable-work has been made since then, consider the latest cable project between Florida and Cuba. This cable designed to handle twenty-four telephone conversations at once is a hundred and fifteen miles long and about one inch in diameter. Every forty miles along the cable there is a small bulge of about three inches in diameter and these bulges are the real miracle of the device.

They house complete vacuum tube amplifiers!

What a tribute to technology that is. To think that such tiny amplifiers can

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be built, installed and forgotten about, operating efficiently miles below the ocean's surface, unattended and all but human in their action. It is believed that the units will last at least *twenty years* without attendance.

And that points up a promise for the future. We're not personally much concerned with underwater telephone circuits, but the vacuum tube amplifier, so rugged and so long-lived, will be a big thing in our future experience. Just as the familiar thermostat and electric motor have become personal robots to all of us, so will the vacuum tube amplifier. It is perfectly possible that the robot built in Man's image—so fond a creation of science-fictionists—will eventually be an actuality, through this very device.

YOUR HUMBLE — by WALT CRAIN SERVANT

IN TODAY'S gadget-crammed living (and the term is not used derogatively) people have many humble electrical and mechanical servants working for them, taking the labor out of doing things. In the field of home equipment none is used so extensively and is so little recognized as the common thermostat. And the surprising thing is that the thermostat didn't come into use—wide-spread use—a lot earlier than it did. Its principle is obvious and simple—and reliable.

Wherever a temperature change takes place, a thermostat can be used to control or operate something. Consequently, we find it used in heaters, in motors, in all sorts of kitchen appliances and extensively, throughout industry. The majority of thermostats operate on the old-fashioned principle of bi-metallic expansion. If two pieces of metal are rigidly fastened together (different metals, of course, like copper and iron, or aluminum and steel) when they are subjected to a temperature change they will expand—but at different rates. The result is that the compound metal strip bends. This mechanical motion resulting from a change in temperature can be used to open and close an electric circuit. From this it can be seen how useful such a thing can be.

The future will see the thermostat incorporated into every sort of electrical device, for it can prevent damage and short circuits. It is cheap, reliable and versatile, useful all out of proportion to its cost. As a temperature indicating device, it is replacing the conventional mercury thermometer. It can be operated in almost any temperature range. While it is hard to classify the thermostat exactly as a machine, it is so useful beyond its ordinarily humble role that a pan of praise should be inscribed to it. It would not be amiss to call this not the age of electricity, but the age of the thermostat!

A LUCKY MISTAKE

By
JUNE
LURIE

SOMETIMES men plan for the future in one way and it turns out another—equally good! A beautiful case in point involves the famous Empire State building in New York, the world's highest man-made structure. When the designer planned it, he evidently visualized a sky filled with zeppelins, for at that time the lighter-than-air ship looked as if it had a great future, as if it were the coming aerial transportation giant.

Well, as things turned out, we know that wasn't the case, but that didn't alter the fact that the designer of the building had made it extremely strong with huge steel girders, expecting that the top would be used as a mooring mast for the future zeppelin.

Now, today, television engineers are grateful to him because the tremendous strength that he built into the building has enabled them to erect a huge antenna structure on top of the building. This antenna structure which will eventually serve the entire New York area is of enormous weight and needs a firm foundation. The building fulfills that function perfectly.

It is a pleasure to realize that in this case a man "built well" with one intention, and while that intention went awry, the soundness of his judgment in using extra strength was proved and justified by the course of future events. It's too bad that this can't always be true. Perhaps then some of the things we are now planning we might modify—for the better, of course. Unfortunately, none of us are seers—and maybe that's good!

SIREN SONG FOR SUCKERS

by
JON
BARRY

BARNUM said there's one born every minute—and in spite of the vast increase in general education since his time, the gullibility of people for patent medicines, nostrums and cure-alls, remains just as strong as ever. Announce that you have developed some medicinal substance, word your claims carefully so the Pure Food and Drug Act can't touch you legally, and you can proceed to go ahead and make a fortune. Patent medicines, with their extravagant claims—and their medical uselessness—are making millions for the manufacturers right now as they have always done and as they probably will always do.

This sad evidence of the lack of scientific attitude among the general public

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is indeed hard to contemplate. Here we have a world in which a man will operate a complicated machine, have a good knowledge of basic science—and then will go out and shell out five bucks for Dr. Pibbleworth's Magic Elixer, guaranteed to cure the ills of man and beast! What a paradox!

A pseudo-scientific jargon has enabled manipulators to take advantage of the popular interest in science. This is particularly true of the so-called "wonder drugs". From the laboratories have poured a steady stream of chemical agents, some of which have marvellously aided the doctor. Others are highly tentative and chancy.

Nowhere is this better exemplified than in the case of agents to "cure the cold." Recently, in Britain medical researchers with inexhaustible funds and thousands of experimental humans, went to work endeavoring to find out something about the common cold, one of Man's worst and most affecting diseases. In spite of all they could do, the researchers learned just about nothing. They found the cold to be a filterable virus, a sub-bacterial infection which can pass through ceramic filters. They found no known drugs which would relieve the cold symptoms ("relieving cold symptoms" is a euphemism for curing colds).

Colds do not behave according to any simple laws. Infection is not simply a matter of transferring cold serum from one to another. In fact the net result of the whole undertaking has been to show that we still can't do a thing about colds. That's all there is to it.

But if you examine the patent medicine trade you won't find this assertion mentioned. There you'll be given your choice of a thousand different remedies, including some new wonder-drugs, and told that the "symptoms of the cold" are relievable.

Somehow legislators and men of good will of the future must make an effort to protect the citizen from this sort of thing, but basically the only answer is education and training. Each person must develop a selective judgment which enables him to discriminate between what is shoddy and false and what is good and true.

SOUND HAS NO SOUL

by

DALE LORD

THE MYSTERY has been taken out of sound waves by the scientist and the electronic technician. With the aid of the oscilloscope, that marvellous instrument which can exactly picture the shape of a sound wave on a fluorescent screen, they have tortured, broken down and analyzed sound waves into their component parts. And what is more, it has been possible to produce practically any sound wave by purely mechanical and electronic means. Why then, haven't ordinary musical in-

struments either been enriched or replaced by electronic ones?

The answer to that one is not easy. Of all musical instruments, probably the only one which has been appreciably displaced by an electronic substitute is the organ. But unfortunately the reason for this hasn't been a case of superior quality—it is generally recognized that a pipe organ has no peer; rather, it has been a matter of cost and size. A huge pipe-organ can only be built in an enormous structure suited to it, whereas an electronic organ, with surprising fidelity, can be constructed in a relatively small box and designed to operate almost any place.

With other instruments, however, electronics hasn't had much success. The tones and vibrations produced by violin and piano as well as the rest of the musicians' tools, are so complex and so subtly constructed that even the magnificent oscillators cannot reproduce them. Overtones and harmonics defy electronic analysis in terms of art.

Completely new artificial electronic instruments whose tones are entirely different from anything we know haven't had more than a very transitory success. They don't seem to wear well.

What does the future promise for these electronic music-makers? Naturally it is risky to dismiss them lightly for from electronic techniques come so many miracles, but it is fairly safe to say that for the fairly distant future, conventional instruments will still hold the center of the stage. An oscillator is not likely to compete with a piano! On the other hand it is perfectly possible that some new principle may be discovered which will enable artificial reproduction of the exact tones of, for example, a piano.

the case of

THE COLD CONDUCTOR

BY LEE OWEN

A FAVORITE theme of science-fiction stories has been the preservation and operation of the human brain outside the braincase. Old-timers to the field—and newcomers—will undoubtedly recall many a thrilling story involving the "Brains." Now the news has been released that for the first time, pieces of human brain tissue and cells have been preserved in artificial media for as long as a week.

What this fantastic experiment augurs, no one can say, but the fact remains that small portions of grown human brains were kept healthy and alive in a medium made up of certain chemical reagents and extracts of chicken embryo, placental serum and special salts! Naturally, the thought of what this may portend is thrilling—and terrifying. At best, perhaps severe head injuries will have a greater chance for survival when the experimental work is carried to its logical conclusion.

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MEN BEHIND

AMAZING STORIES

(Continued from second cover)

Too many things in life are over-rated—including the Red Sox. On the other hand, I've had my modicum of legitimate satisfaction—and a heck of a lot of fun. High art has never entered my head, because said head was full of "flair"—which you are supposed to get in Paris where I have never been.

Pre-pictorial pursuits: Many and varied, but all wrapped up at twenty-one. Predilections: Plebeian. If any one says I'm a toxophilite, it's a lie. Products: There is probably something I haven't done in the commercial art business, but I can't think of it. In case any one deeply cares, my present efforts are stf, all kinds of calendars and a smattering of western advertising (just finished a lot of bull, twenty feet high). Studies: All over the country, for a grand total of forty-two hours. Not the student type, definitely.

Taught myself once (with or without commas) and learned a lot. But the students didn't pay any attention to me and I had a new girl friend and it was an evening class and all that there. Caught my little learnin', lookin', and listenin'. Got a break my first year in the business. Shared a residence studio with a cartoonist, with an instructor and a muralist on one side and St. John on the other. (Can't keep the old master out of the act, bless his pioneering soul.)

What else? What does a middle class, middle-aged, middleweight Buckeye write about? The common man? I suppose I could write a volume or two if I had a "ghost". But who'd buy the groceries for the ghost? Food for the soul, that is, and—perhaps I had better sign off.

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by Paul W. Fairman

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[Editor's note: The author of this incredible story has vanished! Why? We don't know! Perhaps you can tell us after you've read THE CATSPAW!]

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